Student Retention and Transition Series

STUDENT RETENTION AND TRANSITION IN ONTARIO HIGH SCHOOLS

Policies, Practices, and Prospects

STEPHEN B. LAWTON
KENNETH A. LEITHWOOD

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This research project was funded under contract by the Ministry of Education, Ontario.
It reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Ministry.

Chris Ward, Minister
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES iv

LIST OF FIGURES vi

SUMMARY vii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xiv

CHAPTER 1: Introduction 1

CHAPTER 2: Policy and the Question of High School Dropouts 4

CHAPTER 3: Effective Schools and the Question of High School Dropouts 27

CHAPTER 4: Identifiable Themes in the Process of Dropping Out 48

CHAPTER 5: From School to Work: A Process of Transition 77

CHAPTER 6: Retaining Students: The Task Ahead 101

APPENDIX A: Teachers' and Administrators' Written Comments 121

Available on Microfiche

APPENDIX B: A Review of Research Concerning Characteristics of Exemplary Secondary Schools 129

APPENDIX C: Secondary School Dropouts: Definitions, Policies, and School Characteristics 152

APPENDIX D: Review of the Literature on Transition to Work 189

APPENDIX E: Research Design and Methods 194

LIST OF TABLES

TABLES

2.1 Dropout Rates by Board 9

2.2 Dropout Rate and Characteristics of Rule Enforcement in Seven Schools 17

3.1 Methodological Characteristics of Studies of Effective Secondary Schools 30

3.2 Path Coefficients for Five Dropout Measures 37

3.3 Intercorrelations Among Alternative Dropout Measures 37

3.4 Correlations Between Individual Items and Refined Measure of Dropout Rate 39

3.5 Reliability of Measures of Factor Categories 43

3.6 Estimates of Direct and Indirect Effects of Model Constructs on the Refined Measures of School Dropout Rate 44

5.1 Links Between Education and Employment by Themes Emerging from the Literature Review 80

5.2 Perceived Commitment to Transition by Central Administration 81

5.3 Perceived Commitment to Transition at School Level 81

5.4a Perceived Importance of Credentials to Transition 82

5.4b Perceived Importance of Work-Related Skills to Transition 82

5.4c Perceived Importance of References to Transition 83

5.4d Perceived Importance of Personal Contacts to Transition 83

5.4e Perceived Importance of Other Elements in Transition 83

5.5 Perceived Percentage of Students Who Work During the School Year 84

5.6 Comments to Open-Ended Question About the Transition Process 84

5.7 A Summary of Comments about the Transition Process 85

TABLES

5.8	A Comparative Analysis of Three Site Schools with Regard to Perceptions of Transition	87
6.1	Trends in Real Mean Annual Earnings of 20-24 Year-Old Civilian Mailes, 1973 to 1986, by Educational Attainment and Race/Ethnic Group	102

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES

2.1 Dropout Rate Trends by School 12

2.2 Postsecondary Trends by School 13

3.1 A Framework Showing the Categories of Characteristics Associated with Exemplary Secondary Schools 32

3.2 Path Analysis Model for Explaining Dropout Rate (Regression Analysis) 36

3.3 Path Analysis Model for Explaining Dropout Rate (LISREL Analysis with MLEs) 44

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine what Ontario high schools might do in order to increase student retention; that is, to reduce the dropout rate. Four approaches were taken to the issue: the first focuses on the social ecology of high schools, looking at how they relate to their environment; the second focuses on organizational characteristics that others have reported are associated with more effective schools; the third, an ethnographic approach, views the world through the eyes of students in the process of dropping out; and the fourth focuses on the transition from school to work viewed as a rite of passage.

Three main lines of research methods were used: reviews of the literature, questionnaire surveys, and case studies of schools. The reviews of the literature were conducted as research projects themselves, identifying in the work of others key independent variables, dependent variables, sample sizes, research methodology, and findings.

The literature reviews provided frameworks to conduct the survey and to develop interview guides for the case studies. The questionnaire had ten parts. The first seven were concerned with the various dimensions of "effective" secondary schools. The others were concerned with transition to work, school budgeting procedures, provincial policies, and teachers' views of student culture. The interview guides were structured along the lines of the themes of dropping out, but were also concerned with school policies related to school attendance and transition to work.

Ten public school boards in various parts of the province were contacted and six school boards participated in the study. All staff in all secondary schools in these six school boards received questionnaires. In all, data were collected on 95 schools, although for most statistical analyses, 58 regular high schools were used. Data from approximately 2,250 questionnaires were aggregated to the school level for analytic purposes.

Seven school sites were selected in four school boards for the case studies. In one northern board, a single school was selected. In the other three, pairs of schools were selected, one with unexpectedly high dropout rates and one with unexpected low dropout rates. In one board, two schools serving primarily advanced-level students were selected; in another, two comprehensive schools serving a broad range of students were selected; in the last, a pair of vocational schools were selected. In each of these schools, three persons spent two or three days interviewing a total of 30 or more teachers, administrators, counsellors, and students. Most of the data for the study were collected during March and April 1988. In addition, staff at the Ministry of Education provided data on school retention from September Reports for the schools and school boards participating in the study.

Evidence collected for this study suggests that *increasing* numbers of students are dropping out of Ontario high schools. The study uses *annual* dropout rates from schools, rather than longitudinal cohort rates. Annual rates are a more useful rate since they provide immediate information that can be used in monitoring a school's effectiveness in retaining students. Site studies in seven schools revealed that their annual dropout rates had increased from an average of 10.6 per cent in 1983-84 to 15.3 per cent in 1986-87.

School and student culture accounted for much of the variation in dropout rates among schools. Key school culture items included questions about the value placed on different kinds of skills (income-producing, social, athletic/talent, and academic) and the incidence of theft, the professionalism of teachers, and the sense of shared "ownership" of the school among staff and students.

It was found that schools value a certain type of student to the exclusion, almost, of others. This student is characterized by good academic and social skills, a positive and cooperative disposition. Anyone not fitting this image tends to be marginal. The problem in schools is to deliver a high level of service to the favoured students while minimizing the cost of and disruption created by the less-favoured. The main mechanism for creating these different cultural settings is the streaming of students into advanced, general, or basic level courses of study.

The linkages between school culture and dropping out are quite direct. Whether students are streamed among schools (i.e., in collegiates, secondary, and vocational schools) or within schools (comprehensive schools with advanced, general, and basic streams), the separation creates groups that develop, to a marked degree, their own subcultures. Norms differ for each group, norms as to teacher expectations, teaching styles, rigour of curriculum, student behaviour, and the like. These norms are reinforced by the rewards and punishments meted out by the school.

In practice, it was found that the behavioural expectations for students became more restrictive as one moved down the status hierarchy. Schools offering advanced-level programs almost exclusively were quite permissive of student behaviour; comprehensive schools less so; and basic vocational schools the least of all.

Reinforcing the general and basic level subcultures' antipathy toward academics is the accepted view that general and basic credits are not "worth" as much as advanced credits in that they lead no place. It was common knowledge among students that the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology require advanced level credits in a number of subject areas for admission to many technical programs. One result of this policy, noted particuarly in one school, was a polarization of students. Increasing numbers were enrolling in advanced level courses, leaving too few students for a full array of general level courses to be offered.

School cultures are difficult to change in part because of the significant role played by teachers who carry the values that the school seeks to realize. The teachers are the most stable element in most schools. Shifts, if not revolutions, in school culture are possible, although the sources of change more often appear to lie outside rather than inside the school. Only when the clientele possess substantial political power, as in the case of schools serving university-bound youth, does it seem that the fundamental problem will be faced.

"Effective administrators", as defined in the effective schools literature, were associated with more effective policies and better school community relations, but overall they seemed to have little or no influence on dropout rates. Indeed, in one analysis, strong administration was associated with *higher* dropout rates. While it may be that the best administrators were placed in "problem" schools, it is also possible that autonomous, strong principals who focused on the maintenance of order were more prevalent in comprehensive and vocational schools, where firm control of student behaviour was valued by staff and administration alike, while flexible, responsive principals were located in schools serving advanced level students and their families.

If schools are to change, administrators must change. "Business as usual", though perhaps a prescription for success in the past, is not a prescription for success in the future. A school principal good at maintaining a school in a stable environment who maintains the same behaviour in a changing environment is headed for disaster. Although it rings of "social Darwinism", organizations, like species, that do not adapt to ecological changes are bound for extinction.

The key to adaptation is an openness toward messages and initiatives arising in the environment or context of the school, an ability and willingness to assess and evaluate this information, and a predilection toward innovation, modest risk-taking, and a more pluralistic set of values.

Policies and practices affecting student retention are defined and applied at multiple levels: provincial, school board, and school. Conclusions and suggestions were drawn regarding policies and practices at each of these levels.

Nine questions or issues were identified at the **school level** that relate to student retention. These are scheduling and course accessibility, attendance monitoring, school order, punishment, streaming, transition to work, course planning and academic press, multiculturalism, and links to the community. Collectively, these matters structure or organize many aspects of the education that students receive, the schooling they experience, and the types of groups they form.

Course Scheduling and Availability. Those schools (and school boards) that sought, as far as was possible, to accommodate the different learning styles, abilities, and preferences of their students offered the most positive settings. Giving students multiple choices, multiple opportunities, conveyed a supportive, helping perspective that was lacking in hostility; rigid restrictions and a lack of choice suggested the opposite.

Attendance Monitoring. Attendance does matter and thorough, efficient, effective attendance monitoring is probably one of the most viable methods of keeping students in school, both on a daily basis and until graduation. The correlation between student dropout rate and absenteeism we found confirmed what other researchers have reported and the field research demonstrated a number of approaches to attendance monitoring that appear promising.

School Order. In the two advanced level schools studied, student control was a minor issue. As one moved from advanced-level, to comprehensive, to basic-level schools, the emphasis on control and monitoring of student behaviour increased. One explanation for this relationship is that more control was needed in the latter schools because of the disruptive nature of some students. Another explanation, though, is that behavioural, as opposed to academic, objectives were applied to general and basic level students. Our question, then, is whether maintenance of order and enforcement of behavioural rules is a means to an end (the provision of a secure, orderly environment for learning) or an end in itself (students should behave in a prescribed manner because that is the manner prescribed). If it is the former, it certainly is justifiable; if it is the latter, then we would question the vast resources that are currently devoted to the act of monitoring trivial behaviour patterns in one setting, a high school, that are permitted without restriction the moment the student leaves the school grounds. Far better to spend the time and effort working individually with students or enforcing meaningful sanctions for important behavioral matters.

Punishments. As with attendance, we confirmed that the rate of suspensions in a school was strongly correlated with the dropout rate. Being suspended was identified as an event occurring late in the process of marginalization for some students; it represents a temporary break from school which, in the case of out-of-school suspensions, means lost class time, a need to make up work and exams, and the like. As well, it may reinforce membership in a marginal group of students that already includes students who have dropped out. The punishments used to enforce school expectation for schools must be carefully conceived to remove something of value from the student while, at the same time, reinforcing the academic aims of the school. Suspending students for being absent, for one, does not meet this criteria.

Streaming. One can argue that offering students the choice of advanced-, general-, and basic-level courses is a realistic, honest, and feasible policy; it is a policy that received strong support from most of those interviewed and by most questionnaire respondents. Yet, the day-to-day operation of various schools differs so much that a student, depending on his or her place of residence, may have very different opportunities available. In schools serving primarily students in advanced-level courses, it is accepted (although sometimes resented) that parent and peer pressure mean a student will struggle with advanced courses rather than phase down to general-level courses, whereas in comprehensive schools, with more mixed clienteles and perhaps less motivated parents and students, there is a concerted effort to "place students where they belong". Given the relatively perfunctory group counselling at the elementary level and an absence of individual interviews with most incoming high school students, it is likely that those students misclassified into too low a level at entry lack the resources needed to move to a higher level or to select appropriate courses at a higher level. Selecting the level and kinds of courses a student takes, particularly at the Grade 9 level, is a key decision that affects the individual's life chances. In many cases, this process seems to occur without sufficient understanding on the part of many students and their parents of its importance and of the options available.

Course Planning, Coordination, and Academic Press. Part of the school culture concerns the working relationships among teachers and how these relationships affect the quality of the program offered. The literature on effective schools, our survey analysis, and site studies confirmed the importance of these relationships: where teachers in a school work in concert, higher quality programs result. Rarely, though, did planning reach outside the school, to take account, especially in the case of students in general-level courses, of what students would do after they left school. One result of the current lack of clear purpose in the general stream is a lack of "academic press" at this level. An understanding has been reached between students and teachers on what demands can be placed on students in general-level courses; that level of demand is rarely comparable, it appears, to what the students are capable of accomplishing. Without a clear external justification for higher standards and without apparent opportunities that are tied to these standards, achieving a higher level of academic press without losing students seems unlikely without increasing dropout rates. On the other hand, provision of such opportunities would facilitate higher standards and, perhaps, lower dropout rates.

Transition to Work. Ontario high schools probably do less to prepare students for direct entry to work than they have at any time in the past three decades. Changes in technology, in student and parent tastes, and in graduation requirements have led to the decline of what remained of most technical programs; only business and marketing courses seem to have avoided the trend. The only hope, voiced by many, is rapid expansion of co-operative education programs, which generally have excellent reputations. The problem, though, is far more than one of teaching job-specific skills. The bias of the high schools in favour of the advanced stream means that few resources are committed to those bound for the workplace. Exit interviews for students leaving without a diploma are the exception rather than a rule. Links to employers and employment agencies tend to be weak, much weaker than comparable ties to postsecondary institutions. More often then not, the world of work is seen as the competition that interferes with a student's education rather than experiential settings that can be educational.

There are possibilities, within the school, to offer the types of experiences that students desire. Student-run businesses, construction of cottages, and the like, as part of community-oriented packages may be able to provide the opportunity to earn and learn. Some schools in the survey reported taking education out of the school. One comprehensive school operated part of its marketing program in a store-front mall location. Changing the ecological setting often corresponds with facilitating changes in student behaviour. Provision of diverse opportunities may help schools to compete with the competition -- without selling out.

Multiculturalism. That Canada, and especially urban Ontario, is becoming increasingly multicultural was evident in the "rainbow" of colours in the halls of several site schools. While students and staff uniformly reported negligible tension among racial and ethnic groups, a considerable degree of ambiguity exists as to the degree of acceptance provided and perceived among students from, especially, non-white or non-Christian backgrounds. In our view, more should be done to welcome diversity in the schools, especially in the case of adolescents coming to Canada from the Far East, the Caribbean, and South America.

Links to the Community. Both the site study and survey analysis confirmed the importance of strong links between the community and the school in ensuring an effective school. The fact that principals in four of the seven schools visited had, within the past three years, launched school newsletters that are sent to parents and, sometimes, businesses and alumni, reflects a growing recognition of the vital nature of these links. Reaching out to ethnic communities, government agencies, and labour unions, is part of this process.

Six key issues were identified that are of primary concern to **school boards**; these were the organization of the school board, the training, selection, and evaluation of teachers and administrators, the school board's support for openness in schools to their communities, the school board's support for orderly but not over-controlled school environments, the need for review of the form and practice of school codes of conduct, and the need for improved records systems.

Organization of School Board. A fundamental decision affecting the educational experience of all students in a school board is that of whether or not their will be streaming *among* schools; that is, whether some schools will serve primarily students taking advanced-level courses, while others serve students taking primarily general- or basic-level courses, or whether some other form of organization will be used. The arguments for and against streaming among schools are not black and white. Such streaming facilitates the development of school and student cultures in general- and basic-level schools that are not academically oriented and are associated with higher rates of absenteeism and dropping out. Schools primarily serving students enrolled in advanced-level courses are able, it appears, to free themselves of the excessive emphasis on student control issues that often dominate the management of high schools, thereby assisting these students to assume greater responsibility and for staff to concentrate on academic and extracurricular matters. The common alternative to streaming among schools is the operation of comprehensive high schools, institutions that have increasingly come into question because of the need for them to be all things to all people.

We did not look at alternative models; some school boards, we know, are "reinventing" their high schools, creating "academies", science and technical schools, schools for the arts, and so forth. By creating a theme that draws together like-minded students, though not necessarily students of like academic ability, such innovations may provide a structure for school boards that alleviate the negative effects of current streaming among schools while preserving the ability of schools to develop a social consensus and identity that helps to keeps youth in school.

Training and Selection of Administrators and Teachers. With the increasing number of retirements of both school principals and teachers, school boards will have an opportunity to affect the cultures of their schools by selecting staff whose perspective and expertise will facilitate the development of schools that exert a strong "pull" on students. Principals are readily aware of the impact that selection of appropriate staff can have on a school. Selection of department heads from other schools is a common practice they use in order to assist in bringing changes about. Unbiased procedures combined with clear ideas about the direction of desired changes are critical if opportunities to replace staff are to be capitalized upon.

Support for Openness to Community. School boards have at their command the same variety of policy instruments that provinces have: regulation, funding, capacity building, and changing of institutional mandate. They can use several of these to encourage the degree of openness and responsiveness their schools show to their immediate communities. For example, principals' newsletters, observed in a number of schools, could be mandated in a school board, supported with funds from the board, and where necessary, assistance could be provided in developing newsletter content and format. As well, adopting open enrolment policies that allow parents to choose which school their children will attend, ensures that parents can "vote with their feet": choosing one school rather than another. Combined with good information systems to ensure that principals and staff are aware of the decisions parents are making, it is possible to capitalize on environmental press as a stimulus for change; i.e., as a stimulus for openness and responsiveness.

Support for Orderly but not Over-Controlled School Environments. Widespread concern about discipline and order in schools is often reflected in public opinion surveys and in surveys of teachers. As well, research on effective schools documents the association of good order and good education. In this study, in contrast, the emphasis on order was inversely related to the measures of concern, dropout rate, attendance, suspensions, and the like. We came to the conclusion that excessive concern about order, to the point at which *over*-controlled school environments had been created, were driving some students out of school by making it such an inhospitable place. If schools are to lessen their emphasis on compliance, discipline, and order, while striving to create an orderly environment that reflects maturing attitudes and behaviours of students, they will need their boards' strong support.

Review of Codes of Conduct. Again, support of school boards is necessary if schools are to rely more upon flexible, general codes aimed at developing personal responsibility among students. School boards might well monitor and review different types of sanctions and their frequency of use to ensure that they support academic objectives and are meaningful to students.

Record Systems. As schools improve their record-keeping systems that are used to monitor student attendance, they will need to draw upon board-wide technical expertise and, in all likelihood, financial resources. We would expect that board leadership would be necessary to standardize reporting procedures, such as the classification of types of absences, in order to ensure meaningful statistics are developed. Ideally, attendance systems can be linked to student personnel records so that data can be updated on a timely basis and analyses of various types can be carried out. For example, school boards could assess the impact of zoning changes on school attendance and retention, trace patterns of absenteeism back to neighbourhoods and feeder schools, and the like.

The **province of Ontario** is already very active in implementing its program to bring about a reduction in school dropouts. It has adopted and is implementing policies in all four policy domains identified in the literature: mandates and regulations, capacity building, funding, and changes in institutional responsibility. Three specific areas which would involve the first and last of the policy options are data collection, data analysis, and the issue of streaming and the structure of the educational system.

Data Quality. Numerous studies have indicated that the lack of adequate data is the most frustrating problem in assessing the issue of school dropouts. We believe that Ontario has an acceptable system of collecting data on school retirements that can be refined to ensure more accurate and useful information. Currently, the September Report completed by all school principals includes data on students who leave without receiving a diploma, but ambiguities in the directions led to errors in at least five per cent of the submissions we reviewed. Better directions and better screening could lessen these problems. Ultimately, one could envision linked student record systems that facilitate both the collection of accurate data and the tracking of individual students; for the present, though, such integration is probably feasible only at a board level.

Reporting of Data. At present, provincial statistics on school retention are regularly reported in Education Statistics, Ontario, an annual publication. It would seem that much more could be done with these statistics at the school, school board, and provincial level. It may be worthwhile for the ministry to provide each school board with school retention trend data and dropout rates on a school-by-school basis.

Streaming and the Structure of Education. The issue of streaming of courses and programs among and within schools needs to be considered from a societal and political context in order to be appreciated in full. Understanding these links and their history helps to develop an appreciation for the implications different approaches may have.

Ontario's classic "conservative" tradition is one of dividing its educational system into separate, hierarchical levels that parallel the social roles of individuals. Underlying this latter practice is a corporate or holistic view of society not present in the classical liberal view. The "socialist" tradition of the nineteenth century also accepts a corporate view of society, though it differs from the "conservative" view as to the hierarchical distribution of social, political, and economic power. In recent decades the "conservative" viewpoint has been reflected in the Robarts Plan that separated high school students according to program and length of study, the maintenance of two separate diplomas even after introduction of the credit system, and, most recently, creation of the Ontario Academic Credits (OACs) as a separate class of courses to replace the SSHGD when a decision was taken to move to a single diploma. These changes suggest some movement in a "liberal" direction at the secondary level, but no changes have been made at the postsecondary level where the streaming of students into terminal programs in Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) or to universities continues.

Recognizing that the current practice of streaming and allocation of institutional roles in Ontario are not working effectively, it does seem that movement toward a more competitive and less stratified educational system, secondary *and* postsecondary, is appropriate.

It would seem, then, that one or more of the following steps would lead to the opening of the educational system to greater opportunities and competition: 1) provision and, possibly, the requirement of "open" level courses in subjects well suited for bringing all students together. Open level courses would earn credits not designated as basic, general, or advanced; 2) provision of OACs or their equivalent at community colleges so that students with several credits left could finish their secondary diplomas in more adult-oriented institutions. As well, community college students who wish to consider university entrance would not have to return to high school to earn appropriate entry certification; 3) allowing secondary students to register in community college and university courses that would earn credits that could be counted toward high school graduation and shorten programs in the colleges; and 4) provision of a full range of first-year university courses at community college in order to provide a "second chance" for students who did not earn sufficiently high marks to gain entry into Ontario's increasingly competitive university system.

We believe the suggestions offered in this report have the potential for assisting schools, school boards and the provincial government in responding to the problems associated with student retention. These suggestions address not just retaining students in school but also the provision of programs, services, and organizational structures that might enhance the experiences of most secondary school students.

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We want to express appreciation to the many teachers, counsellors, administrators, and school support staff in the school boards that cooperated in this study. Special thanks are due to those individuals in the case study schools who opened their doors to us, made us feel at home, and who generously shared their perspectives with us. We hope that our respect for them is conveyed in this report and that any suggestions for change we may make are viewed as part of a professional debate about how we might all work to improve Ontario's schools.

All of the team members listed as authors of this report participated in the various facets of the study; as well, others were involved. Specific responsibility for writing the six chapters fell to various individuals.

Chapter 3, Effective School and the Question of Dropouts, was written by Ken Leithwood; Brad Cousins of the OISE Principal Development Centre contributed the LISREL analysis of the path model and Steve Lawton the conventional path analysis. Chapter 4, Identifiable Themes in the Process of Dropping Out, is the work of Elaine Batcher, who also served as the full-time research officer on the project who coordinated project activities and, with Ken Leithwood, developed the questionnaire concerned with effective school management. Chapter 5, Transition to Work, was written by Betty Donaldson, whose interest in this area helps to take the study beyond the school's walls. Chapters 1, 2, and 6 were drafted by Steve Lawton, with assistance and critical review by other members of the team.

Ken Leithwood, with Elaine Batcher's assistance, wrote Appendix B, a review of the literature on exemplary secondary schools; Steve Lawton, also with Elaine Batcher's assistance, wrote Appendix C, a review of the literature on secondary school dropouts.

Rouleen Stewart coordinated the creation of an integrated data base from the various surveys and quantitative data collected in the course of the study. Using SPSS-X, she created the aggregate, school-level, data set used extensively in Chapter 3. She worked with other team members in preparing specific analyses as needed.

Finally, we would acknowledge the assistance and feedback from Vincenza Travale, supervisory officer on the project from the Ministry of Education's Student Retention and Transition Project, and Tom Tidey, head of that project.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to determine what Ontario high schools might do in order to increase student retention; that is, to reduce the dropout rate.

We took not one but four approaches to this issue. One perspective is a broad, overarching one that focuses on the social ecology of high schools, looking at how they relate to their environment: how they are changed by it, how they try to change it, and how they try to resist it. The second perspective focuses on organizational characteristics that others have reported are associated with more effective schools, including the management style of their principals, their goals, and their culture or ethos. The third approach is more intimate than these first two. In line with ethnographic studies, it views the world through the eyes of students, trying to see school as they see it. Emerging from this approach is a series of themes, themes in the process of dropping out. The fourth and last perspective views leaving school as a rite of passage, leaving childhood behind and entering the adult world. This transition, from school to work, is a critical issue in today's world where labour markets change rapidly and few can give advice about a future that is increasingly uncertain.

As one might expect from four such divergent approaches, this report contains four key chapters, each one of which stands on its own yet is linked to the others. The first of these, "Policy and the Question of High School Dropouts", looks at the problem of measuring high school retention, at policies related to school retention at the provincial, school board, and school levels, and at practices in schools that affect student attendance. The second, "Effective Schools and the Question of High School Dropouts", assesses the extent to which characteristics of exemplary high schools can be used to account for variation in the dropout rate and related characteristics of Ontario high schools. The third, "Identifiable Themes in the Process of Dropping Out", identifies ten themes in three groups: school system themes (tracking and sorting, negotiation, accreditation, and responsiveness), social themes (identity, interests, and attendance), butterfly themes (sexuality and labouring), and the main process theme: becoming marginal. The fourth, " From School to Work: A Process of Transition", observes the successes and failures of youth who have left school -- with and without graduating -- and who have moved directly into the "real world" of work and parenthood, with, in some cases, continued dependence on others. Complementing this original research are three literature reviews found in individual chapters or in the appendices to the report.

In the last chapter, "Retaining Students: The Task Ahead", we try to draw together the findings of our investigations in Ontario and the work of others elsewhere and consider the possible implications. Our work is independent of concurrent work in Ontario; our conclusions may be similar or may differ. We present as much original data as possible and provide our own basis for interpretation so that others might test their assessments against our own. The last chapter is written to stand on its own as a summary and set of conclusions for the report as a whole.

This focus on the school and what schools and the educational system can do to increase school retention does not imply we assume all responsibility lies at the feet of Ontario's educators.

We acknowledge different views on the issue, including the dominant view that in most cases, students and their parents make the decision for a student to leave, not school authorities. However, our focus is the school; we leave it to others to persuade youth and their families that education is a good thing.

The Data Base

To evaluate the work that follows, it is no doubt useful to know the origins of the information on which it is based. Three main lines of research were used: reviews of the literature, questionnaire surveys, and case studies of schools. It gave us delight when, on a questionnaire, teachers wrote, "Get out in the schools and see what is going on with your own eyes." That is exactly what we did.

The reviews of the literature were conducted as research projects themselves, only the writings of others were the raw data that were used. We queried the work of others: What were their independent, causal variables? What were their dependent, result variables? How large was their sample? What was their research methodology? What were their findings? How much confidence can one place in their results?

These literature reviews provided us with the framework necessary to conduct a large-scale survey and to develop interview guides for case studies. The questionnaire had ten parts. The first seven were concerned with the various dimensions of "effective" secondary schools that we had drawn from the literature. The others were concerned with transition to work, school budgeting procedures, provincial policies, and teachers' views of student culture. The interview guides were structured along the lines of the themes of dropping out that had been distilled from the literature, but were also concerned with school policies related to school attendance and transition to work. These various instruments are reproduced in Appendix E, Research Design, Methods, and Data Collection Instruments, which is available on microfiche.

The next key step was to select a sample of school boards. We contacted ten public school boards in various parts of the province; in the end we worked with six school boards: two northern boards (one in a small community that is "cottage country" to Toronto and one in an urban area), one Metro Toronto school board, one rural board in eastern Ontario, one board in a region suburban to Metro Toronto, and an urban board in southern Ontario. All staff in all secondary schools in these six school boards received questionnaires. In all, data were collect on 95 schools, though much of the analysis we report excludes several types of schools: junior high schools, adult high schools, and alternative schools. For most statistical analyses, 58 schools were used. Data from approximately 2,250 questionnaires were aggregated to the school level for analytic purposes.

After sending out the questionnaires but before receiving and analysing the data, seven school sites were selected in four school boards. In one northern board (the one in cottage country), a single school was selected. In the other three, pairs of schools were selected, one with unexpectedly high dropout rates and one with unexpectedly low dropout rates. In one board, two schools serving primarily advanced-level students were selected; in another, two comprehensive schools serving a broad range of students were selected; in the last, a pair of vocational schools were selected. In each of these schools, three interviews from the team spent two or three days interviewing a total of 30 or more teachers, administrators, counsellors, and students.

In addition to data we collected ourselves, staff at the Ministry of Education provided data on school retention from September Reports for the schools and school boards participating in the study.

Most of the data for the study was collected during March and April 1988. During this time, the "Radwanski Report" on school dropouts was released by the Ontario Ministry of Education (Radwanski, 1987). In our interviews and on questionnaires, teachers and others commented on the report; many condemned his recommendation to eliminate streaming, but many also praised his recommendations for more mentoring in the schools. Did the release of Radwanski's report in some way contaminate our study? We think not. If anything, its release was a boon to our study by focusing attention and raising awareness of the issue. It gave many a chance to "talk back" to Radwanski. For the most part, we have interpreted their comments according to the themes and concepts we had identified as promising perspectives. However, in Appendix A the verbatim comments of a number of individuals are reported. You can read these and hear them in their own voice. Some of them, we would warn, are shouting.

REFERENCES

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CHAPTER 2

POLICY AND THE QUESTION OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Twenty years ago, Bachman et al. (1971) criticized government "anti-dropout" campaigns because, in his words, "They were giving dropouts a bad name." Radwanski's (1987) recent report to the Ontario government recommends that Ontario follow the lead of provinces such as Saskatchewan and Quebec and mount a major anti-dropout campaign, urging youth to remain in school. Contradictory policy directions such as these are common in the literature on school dropouts, reflecting as they do differing assumptions about the nature and role of schooling in the lives of individuals and in society as a whole.

School administrators and teachers tend to perceive the departure of students without diplomas as an individual matter; often, "stopping-out" to work for a while is encouraged so that the student can gain experience and maturity. It is assumed that if the student is not interested in school or is in fact disruptive of the schooling of others, then school is not the place for the person to be. If asked what their school's dropout rate is, they invariably guess low and are surprised at the actual rate. Dropouts are a slow leakage, not a hemorrhage. Each teacher may know one or two students who have left school early, but no one views the matter from a broader, comprehensive perspective. Though relevant data may be available in school logs and reports, these are rarely analysed or interpreted as a way of measuring school effectiveness.

Those concerned with provincial or national policy have another perspective. The correlation between years of schooling and a host of social indicators (crime rates, rates of using health care facilities, income, number of children out of wedlock, and so on) suggests that education has a major impact on individuals and, collectively, on society (Lawton & Tzalalis, 1983). From this macroscopic perspective, the "wastage" represented by students leaving schooling too soon results in major social costs. Yet of more concern, in the long term, is the effective level of education for the workforce as a whole, the workforce on which the nation depends to maintain a high standard of living. It is generally assumed that changes in the economy, away from manufacturing and resource exploitation toward services, implies a need to increase the standards of knowledge associated with each level of credentialling within the educational system. It is not enough to sort children into appropriate social roles using a legitimate process, a function the educational system is acknowledged to play; it must also teach them effectively while doing so.

An ecological perspective helps to bring together the micro- and macro-level viewpoints (Moos & Insel, 1974; Barker; 1974; Gump, 1974; Bennet, 1976). That is to say, it is helpful to consider individuals, schools, and school boards in relationship to their physical, social, economic, and political environments. As environments change, individuals and organizations will be affected. Depending on their level of awareness and interpretation of the events around them, they may choose to adapt, to resist, or to ignore. Adaptation implies changing their own behaviour in order to preserve personal or organizational effectiveness; resistance implies seeking isolation from impinging forces or modification of these forces in order to preserve a semblance of the status quo; and ignoring environmental flux implies yielding in piecemeal fashion -- of being consumed by the forces at work while denying their existence.

At the societal level, concern about dropouts and the effectiveness of the educational system implies a desire to adapt -- to change in order to ensure future success. At a school level, lack of attention to the issue implies a preference either to deny the implications that economic and social changes have for schools today or to, at the very least, maintain the status quo. At the individual level, a decision to leave school early typically reflects a desire to achieve immediate success in terms of employment or to gain relief from the anguish or boredom caused by school.

But what should government, school board, school, and even personal policies toward high school retention be? What types of possible policies are available? What policies are relevant? What are the local environmental factors to be considered? These are several of the questions addressed in this chapter. Drawing on the review of the literature on policies related to school retention (Appendix C, available on microfiche), the policy options open to goverment are reviewed. Several of these, particularly those related to the collection and reporting of data, are discussed in light of the research undertaken for this study. Using data on dropout rates by school and school board, an assessment is made of interconnections among school board policies and school dropout rates. Finally, analysis of school level issues and factors speaks to policies and decisions applicable at the school and individual level. A set of conclusions are drawn with implications for the educational system in Ontario.

Keeping students in school, it should first be noted, is not solely a question of when they are dropped from the rolls. Students who are absent, who are tardy, or who are on suspension are not present to profit from instruction. This more inclusive notion of what it means for a child to be in school guided much of our work. The literature on achievement and time in school (e.g., Wiley, 1976) and the findings of previous studies (e.g., Watson, 1977) that rates of absenteeism, tardiness, and suspension are strongly correlated with dropout rates at the school and individual level, support this decision.

Provincial Policies and Retention

There are the four types of policy instruments available to provincial or other governments (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) in order to bring about change at the school system level: regulations or mandates (telling school boards what to do, as in the collection of data), fiscal inducements (encouraging school boards to take initiatives in the area), capacity building (helping school boards to learn how to address the problem) and the transfer of responsibility to another agency. To date, the province of Ontario has undertaken actions reflecting each of these options: it requires school boards to provide data on September 30 school reports that include the number of students leaving school without diplomas; its school grant plan funds boards on the basis of per pupil enrolment thereby rewarding those that keep students in school; its Student Retention and Transition Project includes a series of workshops and staff training for school personnel; and its funding of Catholic high schools and the creation of the Futures program in the Ministry of Skills Development reflect the institutional transfer of responsibility.

Statistical Reports

Complete and accurate data on the number of dropouts is critical for assessing the magnitude of the problem and evaluating the effects of any initiative undertaken to reduce the dropout rate. Therefore, the character of the data currently available requires attention. In our view, the rather cursory attention given to this issue by Radwanski (1987, pp. 68-70) and the lack of publication of his methodology (Radwanski, 1987, footnote 41) seriously undermine the utility of his report. Our own work indicates serious flaws in the current procedures for collecting data on youth leaving the Ontario school system.

The primary source of data on school leavers is the September Report completed in each Ontario school and signed by the school principal. These data are used for many purposes, including the preparation of the annual *Education Statistics Ontario*. The latter publication includes tables related to school retention (e.g., Table 2.91, Retirements from secondary schools without diplomas or certificates, 1984-85 in *Education Statistics Ontario*, 1985.)

The validity of the statistics reported and used by the province rest, of course, on the accuracy of statistics reported by schools. In the course of the study, it was discovered that a significant number of schools report data that are obviously incorrect, yet these data are accepted at both the school and provincial levels. Three specific examples will be given.

Section L. on page 4 of the September Report concerns the destination of pupils leaving Ontario schools, including both those who had earned diplomas and those who had not earned diplomas. In several schools surveyed in this study, all students who transferred to another Ontario school before completing a diploma were listed as having left school and proceeded to "Other education in Ontario." This error could inflate the dropout rate calculated for a school. Transfers, of course, should not be included in this table, although this point is not emphasized in the directions for completing the report, as it might be (*Secondary School September Report, 1987: Instructions*). As well, this section of the September Report, it appears, is often completed by office or counselling staff who do not have access to the directions for completing the form.

In completing the same section of the September Report, one school that for many years reported having sent over half of its graduates on to further education reported, for 1987, that no graduates proceeded to "Other education in Ontario". Since the percentage of students continuing on to postsecondary education is a useful measure of a school's success, this error misrepresents the school's effectiveness; as well, the erroneous data introduce bias into statistical data used to plan Ontario's postsecondary system. Though it could not be confirmed, students who continued their education after leaving this school were apparently coded as having "Other" destinations (i.e., not further education, other provinces or countries, private schools, or employment).

Finally, we learned many schools classify *all* students who leave school and do not continue their education as having gone to "Employment in Ontario". Though school records might indicate a student was leaving in order to carry out "home responsibilities", such as care for a child or siblings, the student was still classed as having joined the labour market. Such misleading reports clearly reduce the usefulness of these data for measuring the growth in Ontario's labour force and provide little insight at the provincial level as to the actual destinations of students who leave school early.

In some cases, more precise sets of directions and definitions of classifications might assist schools in reducing the amount of erroneous or misleading data reported. In other cases, a more sophisticated screening process at the provincial level that would involve comparing data reported for one year with those for the previous year or with provincial averages would facilitate the identification discrepancies.

In spite of these problems, it did appear that data on the number of students leaving during the school year were, overall, quite accurate at the site schools. All these schools maintained logs listing all students who left; many had exit forms that had to be completed for each departing student. The latter forms were primarily concerned with management details such as the return of textbooks and library books, but they did serve to verify the exit of the student. The primary problems schools seemed to have were concerned with classifying the destinations of these early leavers.

In the review of the literature, we concluded that a dropout from Ontario should be defined by considering the following guidelines:

1. the baseline population for a school should include students in Grades 9 through 12 with

students classified according to grade on the basis of credits earned: Grade 9, 0 to 6 credits; Grade 10, 7 to 13 credits; Grade 11, 14 to 20 credits; Grade 12, 21 to 26 credits; Grade 13, 27 or more credits;

2. only students between the ages of 14 and 21 should be included in the baseline population;

3. the accounting period should be the 12-month period from October 1 through to September 30 of the following year; credits earned for grade classifications will therefore be as of September 1, so that summer school credits may be used for advancing "on schedule";

4. a dropout is then defined as a student belonging to the baseline population who leaves school without receiving a diploma or who is absent without excuse for 20 consecutive school days, unless a request for his or her academic records is received within 45 school days of the beginning of the absence;

5. only transfers as full-time students to other diploma granting schools, public or private, should be counted as transfers; specifically excluded are evening school programs, adult continuing education centres, entering the armed forces, and marriage.

In our own study, however, we could not hold to this definition strictly. First, it proved impossible to apply the credit/grade equivalency outlined in point 1. Some schools classified students in this way, but most schools used the number of years a student had been in the school as the basis for classification. During interviews, students would sometimes give multiple grades, though; e.g., one student reported being in Grade 11/12, since he started the year with fewer than 14 credits but would end the year with more than 14. Second, we were unable to enforce the deadline concerning receipt of a request for a student's OCR or the 20-day absence rule; as a practical matter, to have done so would have required checking every school leaver's record as well as the rolls of a school for students with long-term absences. Finally, all transfers and those moving to other provinces were omitted from the dropout count but were included in the population base.

Calculating Rates

Although most reports, such as that by Radwanski (1987), focus attention on the longitudinal dropout rate (i.e., the percentage of Grade 9 students who do not remain continuously enrolled in school until they complete a diploma), we concluded that an annual or cross-sectional dropout rate was of greater utility for policy purposes. This is so for one central reason: a longitudinal rate cannot be known with finality for five or more years after a class has entered, whereas an annual rate can be calculated at the start of each school year for the year just preceding. If one is interested in assessing the impact of a policy or simply in monitoring trends, the annual rate is by far the most useful (see Appendix C, available on microfiche).

In Ontario, the rates reported by the Ministry of Education of "retirements from secondary schools without diplomas or certificates" for Grades 9 through 12 are a form of dropout rate (Ministry of Education, 1987, pp. 30 and 31). These rates are the numbers of retirements "as a percentage of enrolments in the previous year". Under the classification scheme used by Doss and Sailor (1987), these rates would be considered annual attrition rates. For 1983-84, they are reported as 9.2% for Grade 9, 11.9% for Grade 10, 14.4% for Grade 11, and 19.6% for Grade 12. These figures include students of all ages, including adults. Omitting adults, we estimate the adolescent dropout rates to be 6.1%, 10.9%, 13.0%, and 16.2% for Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 for 1983-84.

Using ministry data, cross-sectional or annual rates can also be calculated. For 1983-84, this rate would be 13.8%. That is, a "typical" Ontario secondary school saw 14% of its students leave school between October 1, 1983 and September 30, 1984 without receiving diplomas or certificates (Ministry of Education, 1987, pp. 30 and 31). Correcting for the inclusion of adults over age 21, one would estimate a dropout rate of about 11.5%.

These figures, even after omitting adults, are considerably higher than the annual figures of 8.3% and 8.7% for 1983 and 1984, respectively, reported by Radwanski (1987, p. 69). Without access to unpublished data, we are unfortunately unable to rationalize the two. One possibility is that he took some account of adolescents who had dropped out and returned to school, something we could find no way to do.

It should be noted that the extension of funding to the Catholic high school system in Ontario means that the enrolment base for calculating and comparing provincial dropout rates will change between 1984-85 and 1987-88 as data for an additional grade are added each year to the separate system. As a result, the province-wide data will be of reduced value for comparative purposes until a new trend line is established. This will take from three to five years.

For our purposes, annual dropout rates were calculated as follows. The number of students who left school without a diploma or certificate who were aged 14 (or younger) to age 21 were determined from lines 7 through 15 of Part L of the September Report. This number includes only those students who leave school for employment or "other" in Ontario. To this number was added the number of students who received Certificates of Training or Certificates of Education (listed under item B.3. on page 1 of the September Report), since these students did not receive a diploma. This total was then divided by the school's enrolment the preceding September (item B.1. on page 1 of the September Report). This rate we referred to as the "refined rate", as opposed to the "raw rate" used in *Education Statistics Ontario*. In addition, yet another rate was determined by dividing the self-reported number of school leavers between September 8, 1987 and mid-December 1987 when a screening questionnaire was sent to participating school boards.

School Board Policies and Retention

Table 2.1 reports the dropout rates calculated for the six school boards included in the study's sample. These rates are refined dropout rates; that is, adult students (22 years of age or older) have been excluded and students receiving certificates have been included. The board-wide dropout rates are calculated by summing the number of students who dropped out and dividing by the enrolment in secondary grades. The rates vary from just under 9 per cent to just over 20 per cent. The rate for the sample as a whole is 13.9%, several percentage points higher than what we estimated for the province as a whole for 1983-4. By implication, either the sample in question has relatively more dropouts than the province as a whole or the provincial dropout rate has increased over the past three years. In any case, the extremely large variation from school board to school board indicates that provincial generalizations are likely to be well off the mark in any given situation.

Why do dropout rates vary so much among school boards? Brief descriptions of each of the boards in question suggest some answers. Two of the boards, Boards 1 and 3, can be characterized as rural school boards, though one is in "cottage country" and receives extra grants from the Ministry of Education for its northern location. Both operate a few comprehensive high schools, most of which are relatively small, although they range in size from 200 to 1500. One of the schools is part of a K-13 education complex.

School boards 2, 4, and 6 are urban school boards, the first two in southern Ontario and the last in northern Ontario. Board 4 is a Metro Toronto constituent school board. These urban boards tend to operate various types of high schools, including collegiate institutes, comprehensive high schools, and vocational schools. In the terminology of the Robarts Plan of the 1960s, they operate schools which serve students expected to leave after 5 years with an Ontario Secondary School Honours Graduation Diploma (OSSHGD), after 4 years with an Ontario Secondary School Graduation Diploma (OSSGD), or after 2 years with a Certificate of Training or a Certificate of Education (Fleming, 1971). Under current terminology established by *Ontario Schools: Intermediate and Senior* (OSIS), their schools offer primarily advanced, general, or basic level courses, though in keeping with the credit system and OSIS, one generally finds at least two levels of course offerings at each type of school.

School board 5 is a board serving one of the regions surrounding Metro Toronto, and as such can be considered a suburban board. Its schools tend to operate on an urban model, though perhaps the schools are more likley to be comprehensive schools offering all three levels of programming than would be the case in the urban school boards in question.

Clearly, high dropout rates are primarily an urban phenomenon; the rural and suburban board all have rates below the provincial and sample average. Only one of the urban school boards has an average below the sample average but its rate is above that of all of the rural or suburban boards.

Table 2.1. Dropout Rates by Board

School Board Number	Board-wide Average	School Level	Regular Schools	Voc./Alt./Ad. Schools
1	8.94%	8.94%	8.94%	-- %
2	12.99	33.28	12.22	72.39
3	10.38	9.62	9.62	--
4	18.20	27.67	17.70	70.03
5	9.84	13.22	8.16	31.22
6	20.33	150.03	13.58	422.93[a]
Overall	13.61	18.76[b]	12.19	53.86[b]

[a] Includes one school with a rate of 800%.

[b] Excludes school with rate of 800%.

Analysis of Rates by Board

School Board Organization and Dropout Rates. The internal organization of school boards, that is, the types of secondary schools they operate, results in considerable variation in dropout rates among schools within school boards. Given in Table 2.1 are the average dropout rates for all schools within a board, all "regular" schools within a board, and all vocational, alternative, or adult schools within a board. (The dropout rates calculated for "adult" schools are for students in the school of age 21 years or less). The average dropout rates are about 12 per cent for regular schools but 54 per cent for the other types of school. The averge for schools of all types is 19 per cent. (This latter figure is higher than the sample average dropout rate of 14 per cent since it is an "unweighted" mean; that is, the average for each school counts the same regardless of the number of pupils in the school).

What is evident is that the special types of schools have extremely high dropout rates. In one anomalous case in board 6 the rate was 800 per cent, a phenomenon that resulted from a very small adolescent population in an "adult" school that had many transfers in, re-entrys, and dropouts during a year in which another high school in the board was closed. This figure was omitted from the overall averages.

The special purpose schools deal with the most dropout prone clientele -- basic-level students, students who do not "fit" in regular schools, and students who have already dropped out and have re-entered school. Only in the suburban board did these schools have a better than 50 per cent chance of holding a student for the year. To some extent, it could be said that one function of these schools is to remove the more difficult students (difficult to teach or difficult to control) from the regular schools, making the latter schools' task easier and, incidentally, keeping their dropout rates lower than would otherwise be the case.

That the rural school boards that operate only comprehensive schools have lower dropout rates might suggest that special purpose schools are more part of the problem than part of the solution. That is, they may tend to create settings in which leaving school is the norm rather than unusual and thus reinforce a "culture of cutting" (Hess, 1987). While this may, in part, be true, it is also the case that case studies of seven schools revealed that high schools play a more dominant role in the life of rural youth than do high schools for urban youth; they exhibit greater "pull" on their students. At the same time, there are few other sources in the community that attract students away from school. Thus, the phenomenon of lower dropout rates in comprehensive schools evident in Table 2.1 may not reflect a purely organizational effect.

The difference between dropout rates for vocational, alternative, and adult schools and those for regular schools, in addition to raising concerns over the effects of organizational structure on dropout rates, draws attention to the difficulty of speaking about "typical schools" and "average" rates. Increasingly, high schools are "aggregates" of distinct programs. By way of example, one collegiate institute studied had recently become the French immersion centre for its area of the board; in another case, a comprehensive high school had gained three programs: one in the arts for its region; one for adults; and one for ESL students in the region. A school's overall dropout rate may be positively or negatively affected by dropout rates in each of these programs. This point is expanded upon in a later section concerning trends in school dropout rates.

School Board Record Systems. Knowing where students are, what courses they are taking, how well they are doing, how often they are absent, truant or suspended, and when they drop out is critical if one is to monitor individual, school, or school board performance. Viewed from the school level, records management in the schools systems visited left a great deal to be desired. In only one of seven schools visited were student records at the school level linked to board-wide student records so that information could be up-loaded and down-loaded in a timely fashion. In several schools visited, teachers were labouriously completing detailed period absence sheets for each student on a daily basis for monthly submission to the school office, a type of record automatically generated by computers in some other schools.

Technology, when used to lighten workload and prepare useful reports, can be used to improve service. Aside from profiling the attendance records of students, a service useful to homeroom teachers, counsellors, attendance counsellors, vice-principals, and parents, a comprehensive computerized student record system can also develop cohort analyses of students that provide longitudinal measures of dropouts (see, for example, Doss & Sailor, 1987). More effective record keeping has been identified as a step that helps to reduce student absenteeism and increase student retention, presumably by focusing attention and spurring intervention more quickly (California Department of Education, 1986).

School Policies and Retention

While school board level policies and practices, particularly those related to the organization of schools and provision of integrated student records system management, are matters that affect student retention, policies at the school level are seen to be the most critical. It is at the school level that first hand contact with and personal knowledge of students is greatest.

The tendency of those in schools is to deal with students on an individual basis and think of the issue of student retention as an individual rather than institutional concern. However, a number of institutional variables and factors were identified which seemed to affect or condition the decisions of individuals to leave school before completing a diploma. Trends in the rates of dropout from the seven site studies provide provocative data on the characteristics of these schools and the manner in which they are changing. Policies related to student behaviour -- codes of behaviour, attendance, tardiness -- and types of discipline -- detentions and suspensions -- seem to play an important role in explaining students' decisions.

Trends in Rates

Figure 2.1 displays the trends in dropout rates over the past three years for the seven site schools. The number/letter codes used indicate the school board number and the school letter (A or B for each member of a pair). Quite clearly, the dropout rate of a school is a dynamic characteristic that changes from year to year; in six of the seven schools, the dropout rate for 1986/87 was greater than it was for 1984/85. In four cases, the trend was a consistent one, the rate increasing from one year to the next (schools 1A, 2A, 5A and 5B). Two showed inconsistent changes from year to year (schools 4A and 2B); in only one case had the rate declined in a consistent manner (school 4B).

Some background about the schools is useful in interpreting these trends. School 1A is a school in a rural setting -- cottage country north of Toronto; schools 4A and 4B are schools with primarily advanced-level programs serving well-to-do populations in one of Metro Toronto's consitutent school boards; schools 2A and 2B are vocational schools, the first for girls and the second for boys, offering basic-level courses in an urban centre in southern Ontario; and schools 5A and 5B are schools that serve mixed and changing populations in a suburban school board near Toronto.

Taken as a group, it is clear that the overall trend in the seven schools has been toward higher dropout rates: the unweighted average rate increased from 10.6 per cent in 1983/84 to 13.5 per cent in 1984/85 to 15.3 per cent in 1986/87. A number of commentators have noted the inverse

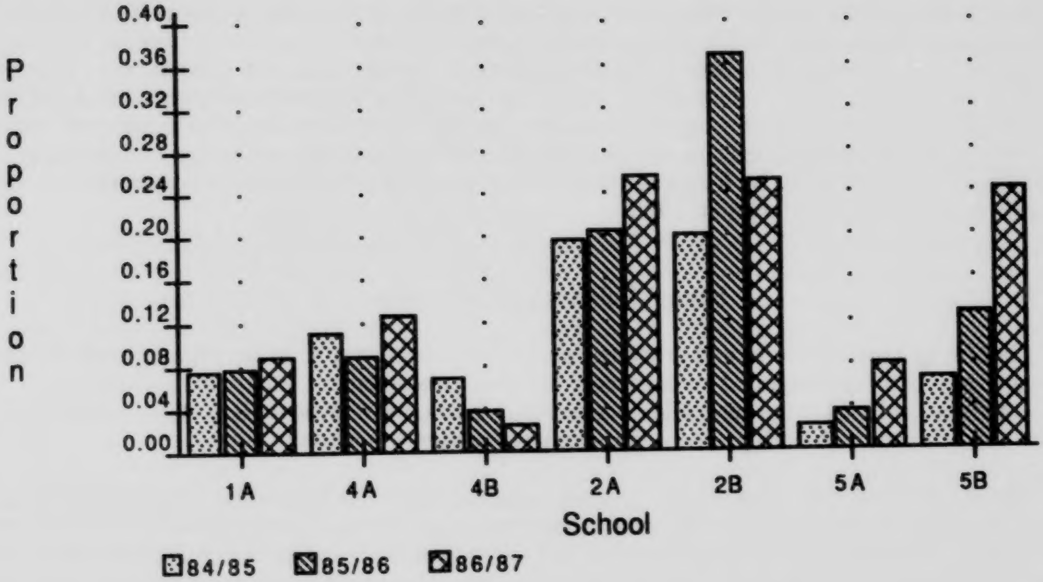

Figure 2.1. Dropout Rate Trends by School

relationship between unemployment and dropout rates: when unemployment is high, students tend to remain in school; when it is low, they tend toward leaving schools for work (e.g., Watson, 1977). What the increasing trend may reflect, then, is the rapidly improving economic situation in Ontario, which has seen unemployment drop to the lowest level in fourteen years (*Globe and Mail*, May 9, 1988). As well, fewer students are applying to community colleges with job-oriented programs, suggesting that direct entry to the world of work is a preferred option (Gordon, 1988).

At the same time, a contradictory trend is occurring: more students are applying to university than in the past (Gordon, 1988). Rising incomes may facilitate such a choice for some families. That is, the changing economy may help to explain contradictory trends -- more leaving school directly into jobs and more continuing on to university -- trends that suggest a polarization within secondary schools or, more accurately, the secondary system as a whole (Figure 2.2). This polarization is most obvious within school 5A, which has an increasing dropout rate and an increasing percentage planning to attend university; at a system level it is seen by noting the continued high percentages planning to continue their education in schools 4A, 4B, and 5A while the precentages planning to continue are declining or remain near zero in schools 1A, 2A, 2B, and 5B.

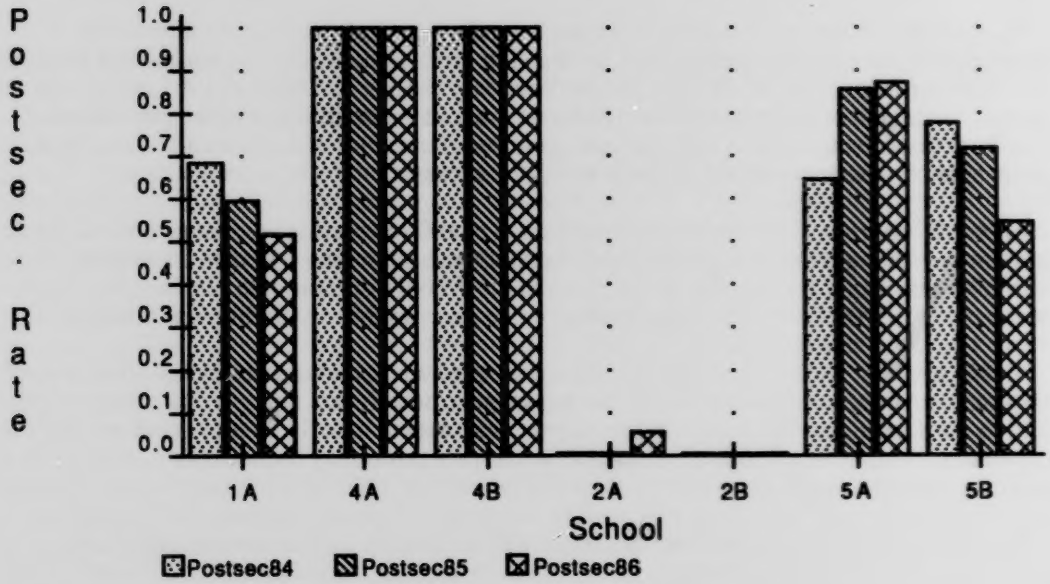

Figure 2.2. Postsecondary Trends by School

Particularly striking changes took place in school 5B, where the dropout rate increased from 6.8 per cent to 24.3 per cent and the percentage of students planning to continue with postsecondary education declined from 78 per cent to 55 percent, all over just three years. A number of factors were explored as possible explanations for this dramatic change. No one factor stood out as the obvious cause; several factors were eliminated as explanations. A recounting of this attempt to explain the changes is useful both in understanding the forces at play and in provoking modesty in those who see the world in simple terms. The factors explored and conclusions are as follows:

1) *Semestering*. The school changed from a traditional to a semestered schedule in the 1984/85 school year. Some teachers reported slower students had trouble keeping up with the faster pace of study under semestering and the principal indicated that the school had had an influx of weaker students from surrounding, traditionally scheduled schools. These latter students wished to get a fresh start at mid-year and were more prone to drop out. If these explanations are sound, though, why did the higher dropout rate not start with the introduction of semestering? If students transferring in were the cause, why had transfers from other secondary schools only doubled (from 95 to 207) while the number of dropouts increased from 91 to 314? A tracking study of individual students might test this proposition, but would require pulling numerous student files and was beyond the resources of both the study team and the school.

2) *Change in management.* This possibility was ruled out since the school had had the same principal for six years. There had been one new vice-principal appointed during this period, but it seemed unlikely this one change could create such a significant change in the dropout rate.

3) *Boundary changes.* It was thought that boundary changes might have altered the characteristics of the school's student body by drawing more students from lower income areas and more from upper income areas. In fact, the last boundary change had been in 1981, which did, in fact, reduce the intake of students from a well-to-do area. It is possible that as the last cohort of students from that area to remain at the school graduated, the nature of the school had changed. However, again an extensive tracking study would be necessary to test the proposition.

4) *Adult program.* The school now enrolled over 100 re-entering adult students in a special program. It was thought that if significant numbers of these students were aged 21 or under then their turnover rate might account for the increase in the school's dropout rate. In fact, the number of persons under 22 varied from 2 to 5, depending on the year, so this possibility was eliminated.

5) *No smoking policy.* In 1984, the school adopted a no smoking policy. Students caught smoking on campus received automatic three-day suspensions. It was thought this policy might have led to the departure of students. In the current year, approximately 25 to 30 students have been suspended under this policy, too small a number to indicate this policy had a major impact on the dropout rate, taken by itself.

6) *Immigration.* The number of students entering the school from outside the province increased from 35 (1985) to 72 (1986) to 121 (1987). Many are from Third World countries: in 1987, 21 were from the West Indies, 15 from Asia, and 19 from South America. The school has a special ESL/D program and upgrading courses in some subject areas. Friction, particularly between staff and the West Indian students, is visible, particularly over the "no cap" rule in the school. Friction among various groups of black students -- African, West Indian, and Canadian born -- was reported. Perhaps the school's function as a "reception" centre meant that its high transiency of students was to be expected. Since no data are kept on attendance, suspensions, or dropout according to ethnic background, it was impossible to verify such a proposition, though the general opinion was that immigrant students were not particulary prone to dropping out. Other studies in Canada have indicated that immigrants are, in fact, less likely to drop out than native born (e.g., Watson, 1977).

7) *New graduation requirements.* Some have suggested that the new graduation requirements mean that more students will drop out since 30 rather than 27 credits will be required for a diploma. While this may well be the case in the future, it does not apply in the current situation since during the period in question the 27 credit rule applied.

8) *The economy.* Reportedly, 70 per cent of the students in the school worked at a part-time job. One fourteen-year-old student interviewed carried a full, eight-credit load and worked 35 hours per week, helping in the support of the family. Job notices were posted in the halls and some teachers in business subjects reported many phone calls from prospective employers. The possibility that students had been "pulled" out of school by a booming economy seems a likely hypothesis, but a thorough follow-through of school leavers had not been done; indeed, the counselling office reported that they did not know students had left until so informed by a vice-principal. There was no "exit interview" with students.

In sum, while it is relatively easy to measure changes in a school's retention rate, it is quite another matter to provide a convincing explanation that can account fully for changes in the rate. We assume that schools can affect their dropout rates and that their policies matter; but in a case such as school 5B, it is difficult to assess the situation when it would be a major undertaking to acquire the data necessary to test various hypotheses. Nevertheless, generalizations drawn from the other site studies indicate that there are a number of policies and practices that do, in fact, affect dropout rates.

Codes of Behaviour

In keeping with provincial regulations, all of the schools visited had written codes of conduct for students. These codes, typically a page or two long, dealt with issues such as dress, smoking, attendance, tardiness, and general deportment. In most cases the codes were developed by committees including school administrators, teachers, parents, and students, though in two cases, schools 2A and 5B, they were written by the principal. In one case, the code was debated and passed by the local school board, with the report making the front page of the local newspaper.

Martin (1987) describes two approaches to "rules of conduct" in British Columbia secondary schools. The first is the development of a comprehensive set of rules together with their sanctions. This approach is defended with the argument that students "need to know specifically which behaviours are unacceptable, and what the consequences are for specific kinds of misbehaviour (p. 8)". The second approach is to use a statement of general expectation about behaviour. Arguments for this approach include: "1) General expectations can be used to create in a school a more positive climate than can specific rules. 2) Specific rules fetter the discretion of those charged with enforcement. 3) General expectations help pupils to learn to exercise self discipline. 4) Pupils circumvent specific rules (p. 8)." Eleven of 35 schools she studied fell into the first category and 12 into the second; the remaining 14 were in between the two extremes.

We conceptualized Martin's notion of extensiveness of rules in terms of the latitude allowed students. The seven site schools differed considerably along this dimension, some allowing extreme latitude and some allowing virtually none at all.

Smoking, for example, was allowed in outdoor smoking areas in five schools and not at all in two others. In three schools, no students were allowed spares and no student was to be in the halls during classes (although there were usually still a few), whereas in others, spares were commonplace and students were constantly present in the halls, walking, sitting, and talking quietly. In four schools, any person tardy for the day or class was to report to the central office for an "admit slip"; in the three others tardiness was a matter between teacher and students. In schools run by the clock rather than the bell, classes often began with a few students still on their way to class (though some teachers enforced strict rules, sometimes utilizing surprise quizzes to reinforce their expectations for students).

Besides the latitude of the code itself, two characteristics of the administration of the code seemed significant: the extent to which student behaviour was monitored and the friction created between students and adults over its enforcement. Again, extremes were evident. At one school, the only monitoring or supervision of student behaviour outside the classroom that we observed over a three-day period was the presence of a vice-principal in the parking lot in the morning. His job, apparently, was to make sure students did not park in teachers' parking spots. On being queried about the lack of supervision, the principal asked, "Did you ever see the need for supervision?" And it was true; though serving 1500 pupils and having a single lunch hour, student behaviour was orderly and the school well kept. Walking with the principal down the hall one morning, we spotted several students sitting by their lockers with a kettle plugged into the wall outlet. They were making hot oatmeal. The principal smiled and asked how it tasted. In another school, the principal, making his rounds, challenged a student eating an apple on his way to his locker, asking in firm tones for him take it to the cafeteria to finish or to put it in his pocket. The student did the latter.

Similarly, one school was permissive about the matter of smoking, allowing it formally in a courtyard smoking area and informally near one of the school's entrances. The adminstration recognized that students from different ethnic and social backgrounds did not want to associate informally and so overlooked the technical infraction of the rules. In another school, smoking on campus was an automatic three-day suspension.

Littering was another matter that varied. One school, having gone to a single lunch hour that forced the school to allow eating in the halls, faced a problem of trash in the hall after lunch. Rather than a reign of terror to shape students up, a decision had been taken to appeal to student's ethic stance on the question of the environment and to set up "recycling bins" -- green for paper, yellow for plastics, and red for aluminum. They were to be designed like basketball hoops to appeal to the athletic instincts of youth. At another school, the principal, in showing us around the school, bent down to pick up a candy wrapper. It was the only litter we noted in two days at the school.

The monitoring of student behaviour was carried out in three ways: posting teachers and adminstrators at different locations, sending out patrols, and, in one school, trusting the matter to students. In the first approach, adult behaviour was more predictable and the policing role was evident; in schools using patrols, the monitoring often seemed disguised as "management by walking around" -- that is, taking time to see how things were going in different areas of the school. It served the dual function of socializing with students and staff as well as providing supervision.

The approach to students also seemed to take two extremes: "nailing" the student vs. "parenting" the student. The first implied a cat and mouse approach: staff told stories of how they outsmarted a group of students by planning better tactics. The second approach meant patience and firmness, correcting behaviour repeatedly, placing students under a behavioural monitoring program, and the like.

The latitude of expectations along with the extent and method of monitoring seemed to combine to affect the degree of friction over student behaviour experienced between staff and students. At one extreme (the school where we could detect no formal monitoring except in the teachers' parking lot), tension did not exist. At the other extreme (the boys' vocational school where all adult males were addressed as "Sir!" and the suburban secondary school where students were suspended for smoking and disciplined for wearing caps), the friction and mutual disrespect between significant numbers of students and staff were palpable.

In Table 2.2, the relationship between the three characteristics of the codes of conduct and their administration and the dropout rates for the schools are reported. Although the relationships are not perfect, the trends are clear: the tightest standards of behaviour and the most rigid enforcement of behaviour standards occurs at the schools with the highest dropout rates whereas the most relaxed standards are those with the lowest dropout rates. This relationship can be explained in three ways. Most often, staff in the former schools emphasize how they were preparing students for the world of work and that their school's standards were the same as workplace standards. At the latter schools, academics and not personal style (e.g., dress and mannerisms) were seen to count. Alternatively, it could be suggested that the "coarse element" among the students in the former schools, as some staff termed it, was seen as more of a threat to the orderly environment of these schools and hence more effort was spent on strict policing of behaviour. This element was perhaps absent in the second group of schools, having been moved to vocational schools in the area. Yet a third explanation is that schools serving more privileged communities cannot violate the personal rights of students with impunity the way schools serving the less powerful elements of society may. The latter schools may be run more for the convenience of their staffs than of their students.

Table 2.2. Dropout Rate and Characteristics of Rule Enforcement in Seven Schools[a]
(Proportion of schools in each cell)

		Dropout Rate	
		Low	High
Latitude	High	.36	.07
	Low	.21	.36

		Dropout Rate	
		Low	High
Monitoring	High	.21	.36
	Low	.29	.14

		Dropout Rate	
		Low	High
Friction	High	.07	.29
	Low	.50	.14

[a] Percentages based on classification by two independent judges. See footnote 1 for additional details.

It should be emphasized that, by any standard, the social environments of all the schools visited were orderly. The extreme cases reported in the literature from the U.S. and Britain -- of schools in chaos, controlled by gangs, and covered with graffiti -- seem totally irrelevant to the Ontario context. Our concern, voiced by some staff and students in a number of the more controlled schools, was whether or not the time spent monitoring students was worthwhile or in the students' interest. Might the time not better be spent on counselling students, class preparation, and the like? Were they providing too much of a "sheltered workshop" for students who would, sooner or later, have to be on their own? And, we must ask, why do we expect students less well endowed intellectually, motivationally, and, often, financially, to conduct themselves according to much higher behaviour standards than those planning to proceed to university? Do higher behavioural standards represent necessary constraints on students who are prone to disruptive behaviour? Or, is there a paternalism present for these students that, in the end, delays their maturity and ability to cope with the independence of adulthood?

Attendance Monitoring

Student absenteeism is strongly correlated with dropping out, both on an individual basis (Watson, 1977) and on a school basis. For the 58 schools included in the analysis in chapter three, the correlation between school absence rate and school dropout rate was 0.59. It is not unreasonable to suggest that reducing student absenteeism may lead to lower dropout rates. In interviews, students themselves say as much when they link attendance to performance.

First hand responsibility for determining why a student was absent varied among schools. There were two primary modes of treatment. In one, the classroom teacher was the first line of defence and was the person with the responsibility to call the student's parent if a student was absent. This sometimes meant that a parent might receive five phone calls in one day. A principal who received a complaint from a parent about such a deluge responded, "That's the greatest compliment I've received today. My teachers are doing their job!"

The alternative approach was to delegate the matter to the central office where some other individual -- a vice-principal, an attendance counsellor, or a member of the secretarial staff -- or an automatic telephoning device would contact the home. The literature (e.g., Foley & Crull, 1986) suggests that automatic phoning devices are not particularly effective in this realm, although the one school visited that used such a device reported a high level of completed calls and had a relatively low absentee rate. On the other hand, those schools which placed the teacher front and centre also tended to have the lowest rates, a relationship confirming British studies that suggested intervention by teachers was more effective than intervention by middle-level administrators (e.g., Reynolds et al., 1980).

In practice, keeping track of absences, and the causes for absences, is a detailed, time-consuming task that is not enjoyed by anyone but accepted as a necessary evil by most. A good system can minimize the load on teachers and staff; a poor system can result in an intolerable and pointless burden.

The system we felt most efficient was one which provided teachers with machine readable cards for each student enrolled. These need only be sent to the office for each period so that the absence could be recorded automatically. In such a system, known absences (e.g., for field trips, illnesses reported, and so forth) can be loaded into the computer in advance and automatic cross-checks can be carried out. These cards are then returned to the teacher at the end of the day along with a list showing which absences were excused. In addition, student profile sheets, showing absences by periods and cause (along with days in the schedule cycle) can be prepared for homeroom teachers and counsellors.

Most schools, though, used less efficient systems. In a number of schools teachers had to laboriously cross-check lists of known absences with their own absence records, prepare student profile sheets by hand, and so forth. In most schools, only homeroom attendance was taken on a daily basis, with period absences recorded manually by teachers and forwarded to the office on a weekly or monthly basis. This approach meant that period cuts were rarely caught the same day so that parents could be informed on the day of the infraction.

In recording absences, we were surprised at the number of separate codes that were used to account for absences. Illness, parent approved absences (e.g., a family trip on holidays or to visit families overseas), class cuts, field trips, etc. all had separate codes. In a school where the reported absence rate was about seven per cent, it was noted that some Grade 13 students active in sports and student affairs were estimated to miss as many as 40 per cent of their classes. Several schools organized overseas trips during "extended" March breaks and one a two-week period of "spring training" in Florida for its baseball team. Without a standard system to use in recording data, comparing absence rates among schools must be done with caution.

The question of school-sponsored absences raises, again, a social question. Schools that authorized the most extensive array of field trips and travel were those serving primarily advanced-level students. Such practices are not typically followed in schools serving lower streams. Even within a school serving two or three streams, students in advanced-level courses appear to be the primary beneficiary of many, if not most, activities that carry the "reward" of an excused absence. If class time is important, then one could argue that closer monitoring of excused absences may be needed for students in advanced level courses. On the other hand, if class time lost for approved activities is more than compensated for by the enrichment and positive effects on student morale that they provide, then the participation of all types of students would ensure greater equity and, perhaps, make schools more attractive to a larger proportion of the student body.

Tardiness

There are two types of tardiness -- tardiness to school and tardiness to class -- and the two are treated differently. If a student is tardy to school, which in practice means being late for either the first period class or to homeroom, the student must check into a school's front office in order to obtain an admit slip. This process is followed so that the student's name can be removed from the absence list submitted by the first period or homeroom teacher, a list which is used to compose the school's absence list which is circulated to all teachers before the end of the day (and usually before the end of the first or homeroom period).

Class tardiness typically does not require a student to obtain an admit slip and is a matter handled between the classroom teacher and student. In all schools visited, teachers varied in their strictness on the issue. At one end of the scale, there were teachers who locked the door at the appointed time, who regularly gave surprise quizzes in the first five minutes, or who assigned detentions or work duty (e.g., washing beakers in the chemistry lab over lunchtime) for tardies. At the other extreme, there were teachers who felt it was the students responsibility to be present and it was assumed that if a student was late, the student must have had a good reason. Only at the vocational schools was tardiness formally sanctioned by lower marks. In one of these schools, each student was awarded a mark for each day. A student started out with 50 points, which could be increased by project work, participation and the like, or decreased by tardiness, misbehaviour and so on. In several schools, students who were habitually tardy and who did not respond to the action of teachers could be refused admission and sent to the front office for an admit slip or for school sanctions.

Detentions and Suspensions

Various sanctions or penalties are a part of enforcing any code of conduct. These penalties must be enforceable and, to be effective, must genuinely penalize a student. In the end, the goal is to make the benefit of the offence (cutting class, being tardy, or whatever) worth less to the student than the cost of the sanction. Two penalties focused upon in our study were detentions and suspensions, a relatively narrow focus given that Martin (1987), in her study of British Columbia high schools, identified 28 varieties of sanctions, including five different types of suspension (less than five days, more than five days, in-school suspension, indefinite suspension, and suspension to end of term). Short suspensions were her 4th ranked sanction, detentions her 15th ranked. The top 15 sanctions were giving verbal reprimand, calling parents in for a meeting, reporting to the police, suspending for less than five days, requiring a change of clothing, confiscating a possession, excluding from extracurricular activities, excluding from a dance, suspending for more than five days, referring to a drug abuse centre, requiring extra work such as clean up, referring to school board, giving a zero for late assignments, depriving of privileges (gym, bus, parking), and giving a detention.

The traditional after-school detention has fallen into disuse in most of the seven Ontario schools visited for a number of reasons -- employment of students, bus schedules, outside private lessons, and the like. Staff at several schools indicated that detentions were virtually unenforceable. Yet, several others had made accommodations which seemed to work.

In the rural school, where most students were bussed to school, detentions were given over the lunch hour. Monitored by the two vice-principals, these detentions were effective deterrents in that it deprived the students of their prime time to socialize during the day; as well, the enforced period of study couldn't have hurt students' marks. In a suburban school, detentions were given in the mornings. An "early sign-in" meant a student had to sign in to the central office at 8:15, 45 minutes before school began. This was usually a punishment for students who had been late for school more than three times. On receiving such a sentence, one student displayed obvious dismay at the thought of having to get up early. Only the boys' vocational school operated a successful after-school detention room; students from this school were unlikely to have part-time jobs or other after-school commitments.

Suspensions had been given at all but one of the site schools. Between September 8 and mid-December 1987, the numbers reported varied from 2 to 73; the last figure was well above those in other schools which all totalled 10 or fewer. Expressed as a percentage of September 30 enrolments, suspension rates were as follows: school 1A, 1.63%; school 2A, 0.00%; school 2B, 1.72%; school 4A, 0.13%; school 4B, 0.35%; school 5A, 0.35% and school 5B, 5.22%. In Martin's study of B.C. schools, the highest number of suspensions was 67 over the entire 1984-85 school year.

Martin reports the primary reasons for short-term suspensions in British Columbia were "truancy, non-attendance, poor attendance". In order of rank, the remaining top ten were drugs and alcohol, fighting, wilful disobedience, smoking, vandalism/theft, obscenities, fireplay, inappropriate behaviour, and graffiti. Although we did not consider all infractions, certainly suspensions for truancy, cutting class, and the like were a major reason for the imposition of out-of-school suspensions (only one school used, on occasion, in-school suspensions).

Suspending students for non-attendance recalled to us this line from Br'er Rabbit, "Please, Br'er Fox, do anything to me, but don't throw me in the Briar Patch." For students who have cut class or school to be with friends (others who are cutting or have dropped out), suspending them is like throwing them in the briar patch -- which in urban Ontario is the local mall. We note that the correlation at the school level between the dropout rate and suspension rate was 0.48, suggesting that suspensions may not only be a precursor of dropping out but in fact an active cause. It was notable, too, that those suspended were most often in the general or basic levels. Such action can only further interrupt their studies and may communicate the message that studies are not that important.

Scheduling, Streaming, and Accommodating the Student

There is a complex interplay between a school's scheduling, the streams offered, and how well the school accommodates the desires, needs, and tastes of students and their families. This connection can be illustrated by the situation in two schools and their responses to certain demands.

In the first case, school 1A, located in a rural community, offers courses at all three levels of difficulty. The schedule is a traditional one which rotates on a three-day cycle. It had been proposed that the school move to a semestered schedule in order to better serve students in general-level courses and to facilitate re-entry of former students and dropouts. It was believed by some that with a traditional schedule, a student in difficulty in a course during the fall would have no option but to drop a course and lose the credit. As well, there was only one entry point in September for students to return. No night school or summer school credit programs were offered. In short, the school's schedule was seen by some to be operated in the interest of the the advanced stream. Reportedly, though 50 to 60 per cent of all students began Grade 9 in advanced-level courses, by Grade 12 only 35 to 40 per cent were so enrolled. Keeping students for all of a fifth, Grade 13 year, was also viewed as important. Many of these students had over the 30 credits required for graduation when beginning Grade 13 and could have finished in a half-year in a semestered school. Often these students enrol in only four or five credits during the year, but their loss to the school would have been catastrophic as these students were the leaders and drivers in the extra-curricular life of the school.

School 4B had long been an academically oriented, traditionally scheduled school but, with the decline in the numbers of adolescents and competition from semestered schools that offered fast-tracking and re-entry twice a year, had begun to lose enrolment. As well, its history of tough marking was seen to disadvantage graduates in competition for university places. Community pressure and the threats to the integrity of its programs brought about by declining numbers forced several administrative changes, which were implemented by a new principal. These changes included a move to a "sem/trad" schedule, higher norms for marking, and relaxed policies about the enrolment of students in night and summer schools. The "sem/trad" schedule is a mixed-mode schedule with some courses offered throughout the year on alternate days and others offered on a semestered basis. Below Grade 11, all courses are offered only on a traditional schedule; some courses at the Grade 11, 12, and OAC level are offered in both modes. Typically, the most popular traditionally scheduled courses at this level are English, math, science, music, and modern languages. Students who run into difficulty in a semestered course, such as Grade 11 English, therefore have the option of "phasing down" to the traditional mode and saving their credit for the year. At the same time, other students may fast-track and finish their high school, including OACs, in four years. In addition, some students -- possibly as many as 20 per cent -- enrol in night school classes, usually in difficult subjects such as calculus or physics, in order to improve marks or because "it fits into their schedule better". In sum, every effort is offered to giving students a second -- third and fourth -- chance to earn an acceptable mark in the advanced-level courses they and their parent wish to see them earn for university or college admission.

While it is ironic that a traditional time schedule is seen to favour the most able students in one of these schools and the less able in the other, the important point is not the particular technical choice each has made. Of note is that one school has responded to its community's broader needs and preferences whereas the other has not.

A growing preference for advanced courses was observed at schools 4A, 4B, and 5B, where a sort of Gresham's law of school credits seems to be at work. Gresham's law states, in effect, that when two coins are of equal face value but one of greater intrinsic worth (e.g, made of silver rather than a base metal), the one of greater intrinsic value will be hoarded. In this case, general-level credits, though equal in terms of earning credit toward diplomas, are perceived as worth less than advanced credits. As one respondent wrote on a questionnaire, "At this school, parents place students in the Advanced program even if they should be in the Basic. It is considered better for a student to fail Advanced twice, then pass with a 50%, than do well in the General Level."

To some extent, this phenomenon was present at other schools. The vocational schools had lost students to "regular" schools that could offer students a few basic courses and some general courses, and staff in school 5A reported increasing percentages of students trying advanced-level courses before changing to general-level. Many students were well aware that community colleges are looking for students with advanced credits in key subjects, though others were far less aware of the external forces that might affect their futures. This school was able to maintain its general-level enrolments, however, by not allowing students to take night school courses and by not offering slower paced, traditionally scheduled courses. As well, the parents in this community were reported to leave education up to the school, unlike those in the community surrounding, say, school 4B.

Ethnicity and Schooling

Virtually all students in four of the seven site schools were of British descent; in three others, this percentage was 15 per cent or less. The number of Asians ran from a handful, or less, to 35 per cent of the student body and the number of Blacks ranged from one or two to 15 per cent. Schools accommodated this variety differently. One school had a "Mosaic Club" and a "Christian Club", while another had a "Chinese Students' Club" and a "Chinese Christians' Club". From yearbook pictures, it was apparent that, in both schools, the memberships of the clubs were composed of students of Chinese-descent.

What is in a name? This contrast in club names reflect two positions on the issue of multiculturalism. The first suppresses or denies the existence of separate groups and values, while the second accepts and perhaps encourages them. In another example, staff at a school rejected the idea of a "Dominoes Tournament" because only Black, mostly Jamaican-born students would be interested, yet the same school had a boys' basketball team that was composed primarily of Black students. The first activity, of course, reflects "foreign" culture, the second "Canadian" culture. This was also the school where Moslem students reported reciting a prayer from the Koran under their breaths during the school recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Underlying both the question of the course scheduling and the practices concerning ethnic diversity reflects the common current of accommodating students desires, needs, values, and tastes. At one extreme, policies, and practices may be or perceived to be actively hostile toward students and at the other to be accommodating, accepting, and perhaps encouraging. The general pattern observed was that in schools which accepted students on their own terms, dropout rates, suspension rates, and friction between staff and students was lower than in those set on maintaining standards and practices that seem related to a fixed idea of what a school is, an idea that sees order and, yes, docility, among students as an end in itself. In terms of the ecological analogy introduced at the start of this chapter, they are like organisms that do not adapt to changing environments. In turn, they provide environments for their students which, while suitable for some, fail to provide nurturance for others, particularly those of different backgrounds, lesser academic ability, or goals and values not well served by conventional schooling. They are institutions that need rethinking. This position, of course, is not in line with many popular views on secondary school reform -- views which primarily advocate doing what has always been done, but "doing it harder".

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, we have reviewed various policies and practices at the provincial, school board, and school level that are related to the issue of high school dropouts. Four policy instruments were identified that are applicable at the provincial and school board levels: regulations or mandates, fiscal inducement, capacity building, and transfer of responsibility to another agency. The provincial role in using its authority to collect and analyse data received particular emphasis. At the board level, data on dropout rates were analysed by type of school and school board location; this analysis suggested important relationships. The school board's role in providing adequate record systems, a role paralleling the provincial role in information collection and analysis, was described.

At the school level, a series of seven case studies emphasized both quantitative data (e.g., dropout rates over the past three years) and qualitative data concerning school policies that appeared related to dropout rates. Among these were school codes of behaviour, rule enforcement, monitoring of attendance and tardiness, sanctions and rewards, scheduling, streaming, accommodation of student preferences, and approaches to multiculturalism.

The findings of the chapter lead to a number of conclusions that have policy implications for each of the levels considered. The conclusions are not themselves recommendations. Often, a conclusion may imply a number of possible actions. Specific suggestions are provided in the final chapter of this report after other evidence has been presented.

At the provincial level, some of the conclusions are mundane but nevetheless important; they are as follows:

1) the directions for completing the September Report are in need of refinement if more reliable data are to be collected;

2) improved processing procedures for the September Report could identify anomalous data that could be confirmed or corrected by school personnel;

3) a revised manner of calculating dropout rates to replace the current "retirement rates" would bring the meaning of the rates more closely in line with the usual notion that dropouts are adolescent students who do not complete diplomas. Adults returning to school ought not to be included in the baseline or dropout populations; and

4) provincially prepared analyses of annual dropout rates by school board and school would facilitate the monitoring of progress on this issue.

For school boards, the conclusions and their implications are more difficult since several strike at the heart of the educational and civic philosophy that underlies their organization of schools:

1) streaming among schools may, in the long term, undermine the success of Ontario's educational system in achieving the province's social and educational goals;

2) student record systems at the school-board level, it appears, have not been developed to a level of sophistication adequate for them to be used in investigating patterns of school leaving, including cohort analysis, and analysis on the basis of feeder schools attended, neighbourhood, and the like; included within this concern is the lack of standard codes for programs and such matters as the reasons for absences. As a result, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of various practices at the school level using administrative information;

3) a lack of data on students' ethnic background, country of origin, and date of immigration (if applicable) makes it impossible to determine, in a routine manner, whether or not school progress and dropout rates for various groups of students differ; and

4) a lack of regular reports from school board offices on school data such as dropout rate, number of suspensions, and the like, means that those in schools are often unaware of the patterns of success -- or failure -- for the school as a whole.

Finally, at the school level, nine conclusions can be drawn:

1) schools themselves, it appears, do not fill the void left by the absence of centrally prepared reports that portray the overall success of individual schools at retaining students;

2) regular follow-up studies of school leavers, with and without diplomas, are rare; therefore there is a lack of knowledge as to the relative success of programs for meeting student needs;

3) the effects of codes of behaviour are not being monitored to ensure that the codes accommodate the legitimate expectations of students with differing backgrounds and that the codes facilitate the development of constructive relationships among staff and students;

4) attendance monitoring systems that provide good information at a low cost in time and effort are not widely used; some of those in use place a very high clerical burden on teaching staff;

5) the allocation of rewards in the form of "excused absences" seems to benefit academic students most while sanctions fall disproportionately on those not in academic programs. Questions arise as to the appropriate and equitable use of rewards and sanctions, and the extent to which they encourage appropriate behaviour on the part of students; also, some sanctions in use appear not to support the academic goals of schools;

6) the degree of separation of students taking different levels of courses often exceeds that which may be academically justified and may result in unneeded and potentially damaging separation of students of different backgrounds, abilities, and interests;

7) adolescent students from non-white and non-Western countries, find little in schools to reinforce the value of their cultures of origin; rather than being attracted to school, they may resist some school policies or choose partial rather than full membership in the school community; and

8) in general, schools responsive to the needs and preferences of students and their parents are client-centered rather than rule-centered institutions; they appear to excercise a greater attraction to their students than do schools based on a fixed idea of what a school should be.

These conclusions are, of necessity, preliminary. What they suggest, collectively, is a greater attentiveness to a set of issues that are concerned with the flow of information to school staff and officials, the meaning of that information, and the types of responses that can be made in order to maintain and improve the quality of education offered.

NOTES

1. Two researchers who had visited all schools classified each on the three conduct dimensions, which were defined as follows: 1) latitude in student behaviour, that is, the range of acceptable conduct for students; b) monitoring of behaviour, that is, the closeness with which student behaviour is observed and controlled by staff; and 3) degree of friction, that is, the amount of conflict and tension (often resulting in sanctions being given by staff) between staff and students over the question of student conduct. Schools classified in each category for each dimension were then further categorized by dropout rate and the proportion of schools in each of the four resulting cells was calculated.

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CHAPTER 3

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS AND THE QUESTION OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

In his recent review of research, Rumberger (1987) summarizes the personal, economic, and school-related reasons high school dropouts leave school. Special emphasis is awarded to school-related factors, and many such factors can be altered. Even after taking into account differences in the characteristics of their student populations, schools differ widely in their retention rates, again implying that there are factors under the control of school officials that can be changed in order to reduce dropout rates.

Research on school-related factors, however, has focused largely on student behaviours in school on the implicit assumption that it is the student who must change to fit the school. Hence, interventions to reduce dropout rates often take the form of counselling and the like. But as Catterall (1987) points out, over the past 20 years in the U.S.A. one-fourth of high school students consistently have abandoned school before graduating and many more do not expend much effort (see, for example, Powell, Farrar & Cohen, 1985). This suggests that efforts to reduce the number of dropouts ought to assume that it is the school rather than or in addition to the student which needs to change.

If schools must change in order to retain a larger proportion of their students, specifically what is the nature of that change? Research to date provides few clues to the answer. As Rumberger (1987) suggests, little attention has been devoted to understanding the influence of school organization, leadership, and teachers on students' decisions to leave school. What is needed, he argues, "is a more comprehensive, causal model of the dropout process (p. 111)." The portion of our larger study reported in this chapter is a partial response to this need. Specifically, our objective was to develop, empirically test, and refine a causal model of school-related factors influencing the dropout rate. What follows is a description of (a) the procedure used to develop the model and the model itself, (b) methods used to test the model and the results, and (c) interpretations of results and suggestions for refining the model.

Development of a Causal Model of School-Related Factors Influencing Dropouts

School-related factors influencing the dropout rate used in the development of our causal model were identified through a review of research on exemplary secondary schools. Such a starting point is justified on two grounds. First, more effective schools reflect characteristics that dropouts often report as lacking in their schools (Rumberger, 1987): good academic performance, fair discipline practices, positive attitude toward school on the part of staff and students, and concern for physical safety. Second, should characteristics of the effective schools identified prove useful in explaining variations in dropout rates, greater coherence could be brought to school improvement efforts. That is, comprehensive efforts to improve schools could be pursued without the need -- at least, in the long term -- to treat dropping out as a separate problem requiring additional resources and effort.

Method

Model development involved (a) identifying and selecting empirical studies of exemplary secondary schools to be reviewed; (b) estimating the level of confidence that was justified in these studies; (c) generating components of the model and hypothesizing relationships among these components; and (d) describing the specific attributes of an effective school within each component of the model.

Selecting Studies for Review. Twenty original studies of effective secondary schools provided the primary data for model development. These studies were identified through a process of ERIC searches, bibliographic follow-up, and prior knowledge of the researchers. Studies of effective secondary schools on which to draw were quite limited in number so rigorous criteria were not used. To be included in the review, a study only had to be concerned about exemplary secondary school practices, report original data, and provide sufficient methodological detail to be described, as in Table 3.1.

Estimating level of confidence in results. Three methods were used to assess the quality of each of the 20 studies: analysis of their methodological characteristics; a consideration of the number of studies available relative to the number available for similar literature reviews; and a comparison of substantive results with results of research on exemplary elementary schools.

Only modest levels of confidence in the studies' conclusions are warranted, based on an analysis of the characteristics of the studies reviewed: this is a consequence of variation in how effectiveness was defined, and relatively weak research designs. Among the 20 studies included in the review, some 26 specific criteria (or dependent variables) were used to define the meaning of "effective" or "exemplary". These 26 criteria can be clustered into 7 categories: student achievement, student attitude, student behaviour (including dropping out), teaching and teachers, curriculum quality, parental attitudes, and other school-related features (e.g., self-defined school purposes). Several studies used a large number of specific criteria in making judgements of effectiveness; only one criterion was used by others (Table 3.1.). Direct measures of student achievement, attitude, or behaviour were used in 13 studies whereas rather global impressions of effectiveness were used in five. Dropout rates were used as a criterion of effectiveness only by Huddle (1986) and Coleman and Hoffer (1987). The studies as a whole, then, demonstrated great variation in their treatment of the dependent variable; only small numbers of studies provided evidence concerning any selected criterion of effectiveness. Furthermore, procedures used to describe the dependent variable ranged widely in their rigour from standardized achievement testing through impressions of a school's reputation by professionals outside the school.

Research designs and other relevant methodological characteristics are summarized in Table 3.1. Multiple case studies (8) and several different types of surveys (11) encompass most of the variation in study designs. Arehart's (1979) study can be classed as a pre-experiment, Goodlad (1984) used both surveys and case studies and Rutter et al., (1979) labelled their own design as a "comparative survey". Neither of the dominant designs provides strong evidence of cause and effect relationships.

A second basis for assessing the confidence to be placed in this research concerns the relative number of studies included in the review. Most social science research is poorly controlled for a variety of ethical, economic, and other practical reasons. Confidence, as a result, develops as similar results emerge from a relatively large corpus of research. The question is: How should a corpus of 20 studies be judged? The answer is necessarily norm-referenced and can only be suggestive. For example, Leithwood and Montgomery's (1982) review of effective elementary school principals included 39 studies; Cousins and Leithwood's (1986) review of evaluation utilization encompassed 65 studies. By these standards, the 20 studies in this review provide a small body of evidence from which to describe effective secondary schools.

Comparing the results of research on effective secondary schools with comparable research on elementary schools was the final method used for estimating the level of confidence to be placed in the results of this review. There is some debate about whether the characteristics of effective elementary and secondary schools ought to be similar. As compared with elementary schools, it has been suggested that secondary schools are usually larger, have greater role differentiation, and pursue more diverse outcomes, for example. These differences make communication more difficult, complicate the process of arriving at a consensus about instructional goals, and reduce the possibility of principals exercising direct instructional leadership (Firestone & Herriot, 1982; Farrar, Neufeld & Miles, 1984). Murphy and Hallinger (1985), however, argue that these differences are more apparent than real in terms of their consequences for effective schooling. Furthermore, (especially with school size factored out), little evidence is available to support claims for differences and, in any event, similarities ought to be significant. For these reasons, we considered evidence from studies of effective elementary schools which identified traits in common with those appearing in the 20 secondary school studies reviewed to be corroborating and thus contribute to confidence in their results.

Five reviews of research on effective elementary schools were used for the comparison (Werl et al., 1984; Edmonds, 1979; Cohen, 1982; Duckett, 1980; MacKenzie, 1983). Considerable variation among the reviews was evident in the rigour with which they were carried out and the detail in which they reported characteristics of effective elementary schools. Duckett (1980) was exemplary on both counts, offering an analysis of over 1200 studies combined with expert opinion and original case study data. A major limitation of the comparison, as a whole, was the lack of detailed reporting of results in the reviews and the difficulty that presented in drawing comparisons. Nevertheless, support was found in the reviews of effective elementary schools for at least some aspect of 23 of the 34 characteristics of effective secondary schools identified in the review of the 20 original studies.

Generating categories and relationships. Seven categories of factors within which secondary schools appear to vary in effectiveness were evident in the studies reviewed. These dimensions and the relationships among them are summarized in Figure 3.1: they include the goals given priority by the school, the attributes and practices of teachers and administrators, the nature of school programs and classroom instruction, school policies and organization features, school culture, and the nature of school-community relations. These categories of factors have either direct and/or indirect influences on students' experiences in school; these experiences, in turn, determine students' academic achievement, types of attitudes, and behaviours such as vandalism, attendance, dropping out, and the like.

The seven categories of factors identified in Figure 3.1 were developed by reading of not only the original empirical studies included in this review but theoretically oriented discussions, as well. Once identified, the categories served as the basis for analysing the studies reviewed and for developing the causal model. All characteristics of effective schools reported in the review studies were readily classified using these categories. It is not possible to argue strongly for the validity of the relationships among categories of characteristics suggested by the lines and arrows in Figure 3.1. It represents a hypothetical set of relationships requiring much further exploration.

Table 3.1: Methodological Characteristics of Studies of Effective Secondary Schools

	Authors	Categories of Dependent Variables[a]	Design	Sample: Nature and Procedures	Data Collection Instruments and Procedures
1.	Arehart (1979)	S. ach.	Pre-experiment	Volunteer: 23 teachers, 26 classes	Achievement tests, class observations, Q-sort
2.	Coleman & Hoffer (1987)	S. ach., SB	Survey	Random: approximately 25,000 students	Achievement tests, indices of student achievement
3.	Ford Foundation (1984)	Other	Multiple case	Selected: staffs in studies	Interviews, 110 schools observations
4.	Frederick, Walberg & Rasher (1979)	S. ach.	Survey	Selected (convenience): 175 classrooms in 26 schools	Achievement tests, class observations
5.	Goodlad (1984)		Survey, case studies	Selected: 38 schools, 8,624 parents, 1,350 teachers, 17,163 students	Interviews questionnaires, class observations
6.	Gunn & Holdaway (1986)	Other	Survey	Population: 133 principals	Questionnaire, interviews with 10 principals
7.	Hamisch (1987)	S. ach.	Survey	Stratified cluster: 800 schools, 18,684 students	Secondary analysis of data collected by Coleman et al., (1982)
8.	Huddle (1986)	SB, T, Others unknown	Multiple case studies	Selected: 571 schools	Interviews, observations
9.	Keith & Page (1985)		Survey	Random: 3,922 Black students, 3,146 Hispanic students	Secondary analysis of data collected by Coleman et al., (1982)
10.	Lightfoot (1983)	Other	Multiple case studies	Selected: 6 schools	Interviews, observations, documents

Table 3.1 (cont.): Methodological Characteristics of Studies of Effective Secondary Schools

	Authors	Categories of Dependent Variables[a]	Design	Sample: Nature and Procedures	Data Collection Instruments and Procedures
11.	Lipsitz (1984)	S. ach., SB, P, Other	Multiple case studies	Selected: 4 schools	Observation
12.	Little (1982)	S. ach., Other	Multiple case studies	Selected: 3 secondary, 3 elementary schools, 28 administrators, 105 teachers	Interviews, observations, achievement tests
13.	Madaus, Kellaghan, & Rukow (1976)	S. ach.	Survey	Random: 38 schools, 49 classes, 900 students	Achievement tests
14.	McNeil (1986)	T, SA	Multiple case studies	Selected: 4 secondary schools	Interviews, observations, document analysis
15.	Morgan (1979)	SA	Multiple case studies	Selected: 3 schools, 15 classes	Class observation, interviews, questionnaires
16.	Murphy & Hallinger (1985)	Other	Survey	Selected: principals in 18 "effective" schools	Questionnaires
17.	Rossman, Corbett & Firestone (1985)	S. ach., SB	Multiple case studies	Selected: 35 schools	Interviews, observations, records, ach. tests
18.	Roueche & Baker (1986)	Other	Survey	Selected: 154 schools, 34 principals, 89 teachers	Questionnaire, rating scales
19.	Rutter et al. (1979)	SB, S. ach.	Comparative survey	Selected: 12 schools	Pupil characteristics, school processes outcome (SB; S. ach.) battery
20.	Walberg & Shanahan (1983)	S. ach.	Survey	Random: 24,159 students	Secondary analysis of data collected by Coleman et al. (1982)

[a] Key: S. ach. - student achievement; SA - student attitude; SB - student behaviour; T - teaching and teachers; curriculum; PA - parental attitude; Other - other school features.

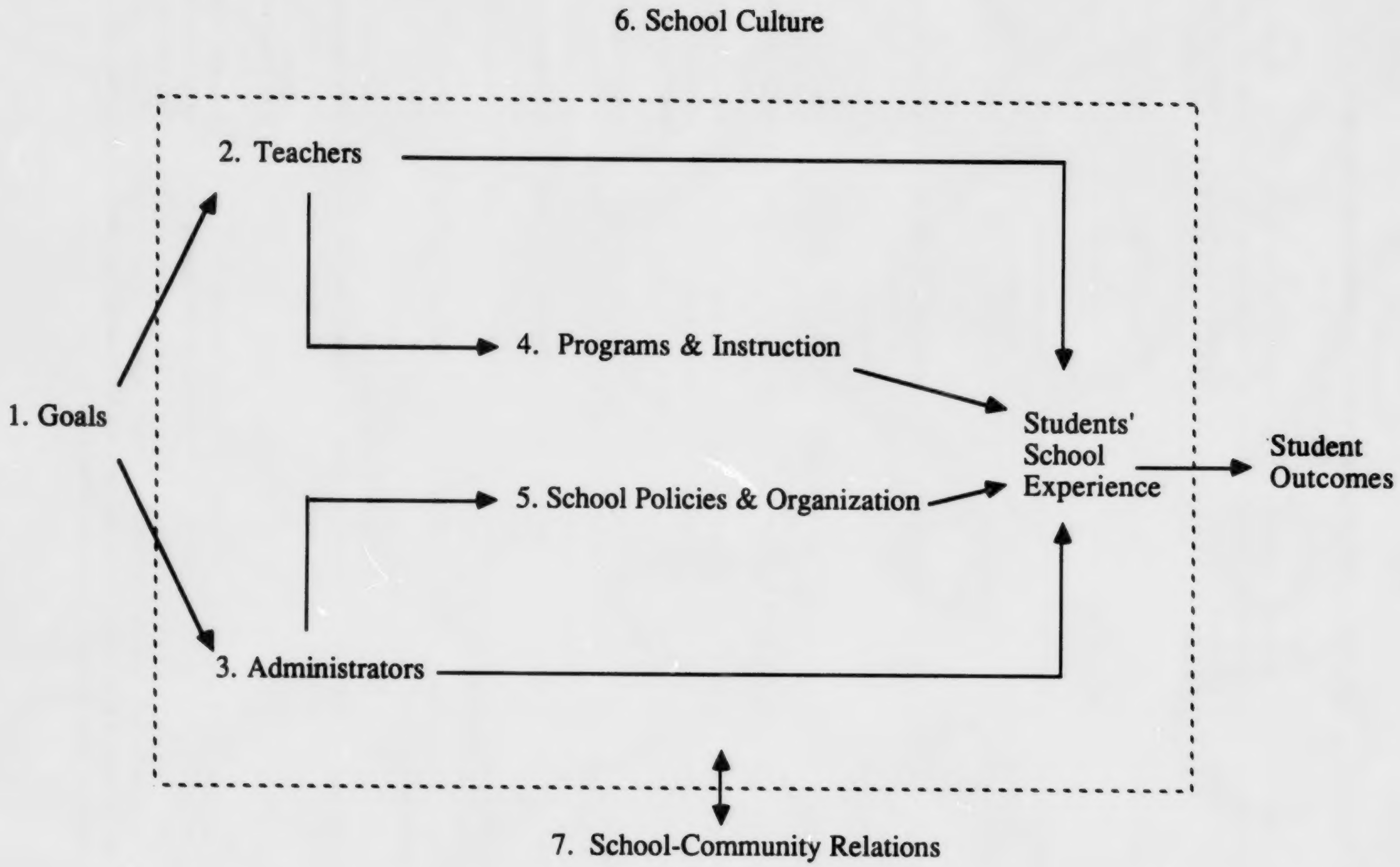

6. School Culture
2. Teachers
4. Programs & Instruction
1. Goals
Students' School Experience
Student Outcomes
5. School Policies & Organization
3. Administrators
7. School-Community Relations

Figure 3.1. A Framework Showing the Categories of Characteristics Associated with Exemplary Secondary Schools

Describing specific attributes of effective schools. A content analysis of the results of the 20 studies reviewed yielded 34 specific attributes of effective secondary schools, most identified in two or more studies. We summarize these attributes here; they are described in considerably more detail elsewhere.[1]

Goals included both short and long term outcomes considered important for students to achieve; they also included the conditions in the school that would be necessary to accomplish such outcomes (the term "vision" was used in reference to a combination of student outcomes and school conditions). Four studies[2] explicitly identified aspects of the school's goals as an explanation of differences in secondary school effectiveness including clarity, academic emphasis, use in decision-making, and use in creating a sense of affiliation within the school.

Nine studies[3] identified qualities of teachers found in exemplary secondary schools. These qualities addressed five aspects of the teacher (several of which overlap with aspects of "Programs and Instruction") including relevant personal qualities, view of a teacher's role, disposition toward students, and disposition toward collaboration with other teachers.

The seven studies[4] describing the nature of school administration in exemplary schools identified five clusters of phenomena: basic beliefs of administrators; the nature and use of administrators' goals, emphases among and knowledge about factors in the school influencing students' experiences, strategies used by administrators to influence factors (the studies reviewed provided most information about this cluster), and administrators' decision-making processes.

Seven studies[5] identified school policies affecting students and teachers, as well such other organizational features as school size, the use of time, the amount of school-level discretion, and district support for school initiatives.

Thirteen[6] of the twenty studies identified some aspect of programs and instruction as explaining the exceptional impact of effective secondary schools. For these purposes, the term "program" included the curriculum content presented to students, the degree of choice among courses available to students, and the extent of "articulation" among program components. Among the features of programs and instruction attributed greatest importance were an academic emphasis, core curriculum requirements, a relatively rich array of curriculum offerings, program coherence, and carefully planned instruction based on sound learning principles. Also of importance were the efficient use of instructional time and the systematic monitoring of student progress.

Rossman, Corbett and Firestone (1985) define "culture" as a "unique set of core norms, values and beliefs that are widely shared throughout the organization (p. 5). Rutter et al. (1979) use the term "ethos" in reference to "a climate of expectations or modes of behaving (pp. 55-56)", suggesting that in many cases individual actions are less important in their own right than in the accumulated impact they have on what it feels like to be a member of the school organization. Although an abstract dimension of schools, effective schools research (whether elementary or secondary oriented) has given culture, ethos, or climate prominence as an explanation for differences among schools. Effective school cultures were described in the 11 studies which addressed this dimension[7] as shared and student centred.

School-community relationships were identified in three studies[8] as an important discriminator among schools which varied in effectiveness. Unlike the case in elementary schools, such relationships were not with parents directly but were instead with non-parents who had a direct contribution to make to the school and with the community at large. Effective secondary schools, it was reported, made effective use of such community resources as volunteers and student tutors. Such schools also developed solid working relationships with local business and industry (for career training, for example) and with colleges and universities (for assistance to academically talented students, for example). Effective schools were responsive to their particular social and political milieus and generated high levels of community support.

Testing the Model of School-Related Factors Influencing Dropout Rate

Method

Descriptive information about the status of each of the components in the model in a sample of schools was provided through the responses of the schools' administrators and teachers to a questionnaire. Several means were used to obtain information about dropout rates in these same schools. Two forms of path analysis were conducted to test the model using this information.

Sampling procedure. The achieved sample for the study included 58 secondary schools drawn from six school boards in the province of Ontario. Questionnaire responses were analysed from 2085 principals, vice-principals, department heads, assistant department heads, and teachers. The number of questionnaires from schools varied from 13 to 54 per school, with an average of 36. Variation in geographical location, size of student population, wealth, and administrative structure were the criteria for choice of boards.

Instruments. Each school received a preliminary questionnaire during the first week of December 1987 (usually completed by the principal) in which descriptive information was collected about grades taught, student population, program characteristics, and three of five estimates of dropout rate.

The five measures of dropout rate or related variables included:

(a) Attendance rates: based on the number of students absent on October 5, 1987, as reported in the preliminary questionnaire;

(b) Suspension rates: based on the number of suspensions since September 8, 1987, as reported in the preliminary questionnnaire;

(c) Self-reported dropout: based on the number of students who had been dropped from the rolls since September 8, 1987, as reported in the preliminary questionnaire;

(d) Ministry of Education reported dropout rate calculated as the proportion of students enrolled in the school on October 1, 1986 who had left school between that date and September 30, 1987 without a diploma or certificate and not continued their education elsewhere.

(e) Refined dropout rate: this measure, developed specifically for the study, was a response to what Williams (1987) identified as five key dimensions essential to developing meaningful data on dropout rate. Operational definitions for these dimensions were developed for this study (Lawton, 1987).[9]

Information about the attributes of each school needed to test the model of school-related factors influencing dropout rates was collected using a questionnaire developed for the study (The Student Retention and Transition Questionnaire, Appendix E, available on microfiche). This questionnaire included 34 closed items measuring attributes of effective schools identified in the literature review. In addition, the questionnaire included 19 items related to transition to work, the school's budgeting process, provincial policies affecting secondary schools, and student culture. Responses to these additional questions supplemented qualitative data collected as part of the larger study and are not reported in this chapter.

Data analysis. Data were analysed using standard statistical methods. The causal model was tested using path analysis, a technique that assessed the impact that each independent (or "causal") variable has on each dependent (or "effect") variable.[10]

Results

Hoyt estimates of reliability and descriptive statistics for each of the seven components in the model used to explain dropping out were calculated.[11] Variables were constructed by computing the average of questionnaire item scores for each school. Acceptable levels of reliability (i.e., Hoyt estimate = 0.50) were obtained for the constructs Goals, Teachers, Administrators, and School Culture. Measures of Programs and Instruction and School-Community Relationships yielded reliabilities coefficients that were very low and the measure of school policies and organization was found not to be reliable.

Figure 3.2 presents the first path diagram used to assess the effects of the model's components on student dropout rate. The refined measure of dropout rate was used as the dependent variable because it was considered the most valid measure; it also explained much more of the variation than the alternative dropout measures (see Table 3.2). School Culture and Goals were treated as external variables (not influenced by other variables in the system). A negative relationship between a variable and dropout rate means that the effect of the characteristic is to reduce the dropout rate. That is, higher scores (e.g., higher Teacher effectiveness) are associated with lower dropout rates. Of the five variables directly affecting the dropout rate, three were negative and statistically significant: School/community relations (-0.62), Teachers (-0.43), and Programs and Instruction (-0.32). Together, these five paths explain 55 per cent of the variation in dropout rate.

Beginning at the left of the model with Goals and School Culture, there are two dominant paths influencing dropout rate, shown in bold on the diagram (Figure 3.2). The strongest path suggests that School Culture has a positive influence on Teachers (0.74). Teachers, in turn, affect dropping out directly (-0.43) through their influence on Programs and Instruction (0.68). The second dominant path influencing the dropout rate begins with Goals: these have a strong influence on school administrators (0.62). The primary influence of Administrators appears to be on School/Community Relations (0.21). Better School/Community relations were associated with lower dropout rates. Administrators also had some influence on School Policies and Organization (0.38) but the latter was not associated with dropout rates. The direct effect of Administrators on dropout rate was also not significant, although it is interesting to note that this path coefficient was positive, implying a tendency for schools with more effective administrators (as measured by the questionnaire) to have higher dropout rates.

An alternative statistical technique was used which facilitates the estimation of the size of both direct and indirect effects. Overall, the results confirm the first analysis.[12] Table 3.3 displays the intercorrelations among the five alternative measures related to dropping out used in the study. All correlations were positive and, except the correlation between absence rate and the self-reported dropout rate, all were statistically significant.

Table 3.4 reports correlations between the scores on individual items measuring each construct in the model (see Appendix E) and the refined dropout measure. The overall correlation for each set

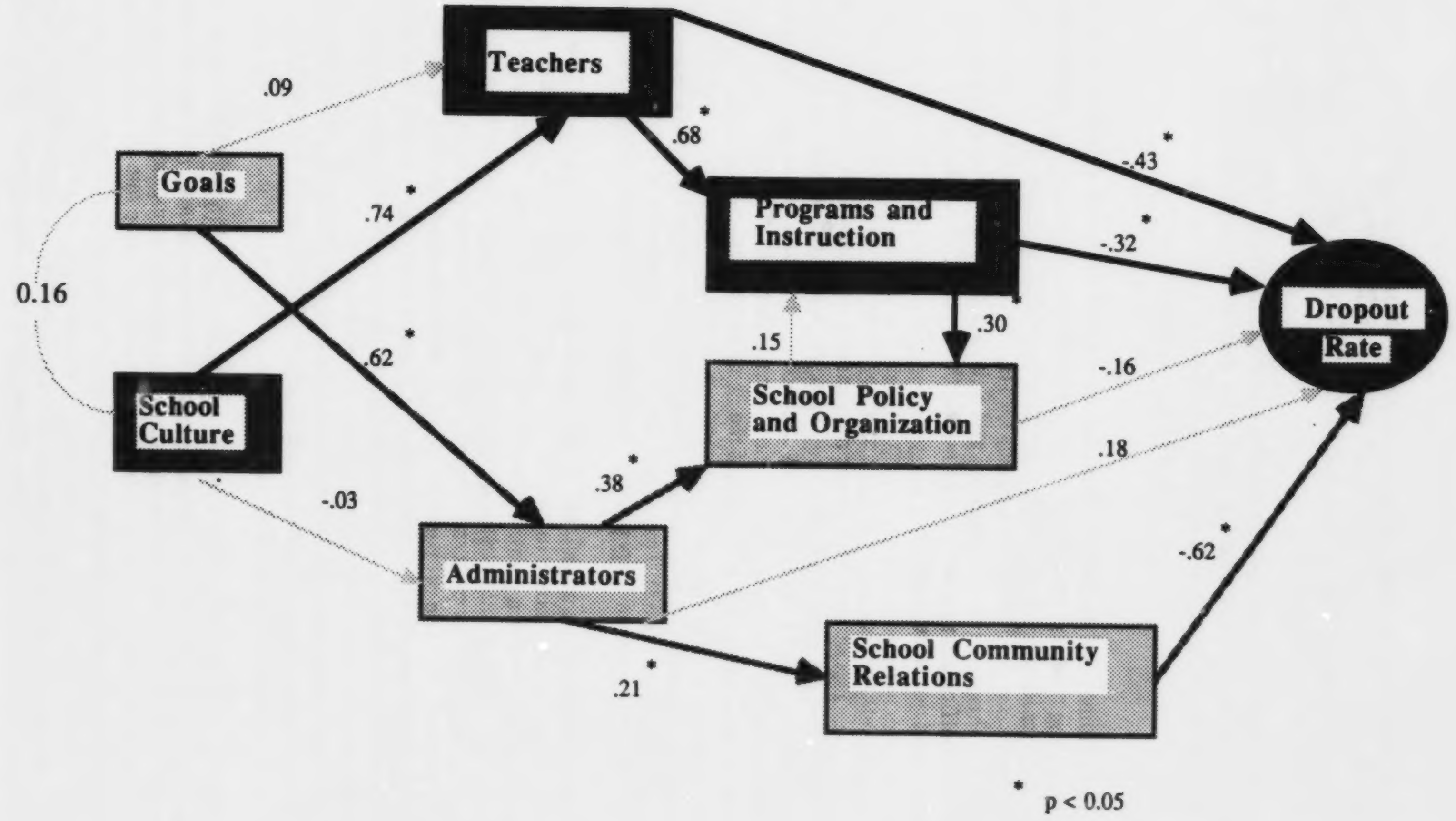

Teachers
Goals
School Culture
Programs and Instruction
School Policy and Organization
Administrators
School Community Relations
Dropout Rate
0.16
.09
.74*
.62*
-.03
.68*
.38*
.21*
.15
.30*
-.43*
-.32*
-.16
.18
-.62*
* p < 0.05

Figure 3.2. Path Analysis Model for Explaining Dropout Rate
(n = 58; regression analysis)

Table 3.2. Path Coefficients for Five Dropout Measures[a]

Alternative Paths	Refined Dropout Rate	Absence Rate	Suspension Rate	Self-Reported Dropout Rate	Ministry Retirement Rate
1. From Teachers	-0.43	-0.54	-0.11	-0.34	-0.31
2. From Prog. & Instr.	-0.32	0.04	-0.28	-0.32	-0.14
3. From School Policies and Org.	-0.16	-0.37	-0.09	-0.19	0.10
4. From Administrators	0.18	0.31	-0.05	0.14	0.00
5. From School-Community Relations	-0.62	-0.36	-0.25	-0.50	-0.26
Unexplained Variation	0.45	0.61	0.85	0.60	0.77

[a] p less than or equal to 0.05 for coefficients with absolute values greater than 0.20.

Table 3.3. Intercorrelations Among Alternative Dropout Measures
(Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, n = 58)

Measure	Absence Rate	Suspension Rate	Self-Report D/O Rate	Ministry Ret. Rate
Refined D/O Rate	0.59**	0.77**	0.48**	0.65**
Absence Rate		0.57**	0.18	0.31**
Suspension Rate			0.21*	0.57**
Self-Reported D/O Rate				0.29**

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

of items with the dropout rate is reported as well. Negative correlations indicate that the higher the value of a variable, the lower the dropout rate. These correlations provide more specific information about the particular attributes that contribute most to school retention. These attributes include:

1. Goals	- the importance attributed to intellectual goals for students
2. Teachers	- the amount of time teachers spend with students outside regular classes - high expectations for all students by staff - high levels of collaboration among teachers in making curriculum and instructional decisions
3. School Policies and Organization	- relatively flexible minimum standards of student academic performance - a high proportion of the school day devoted to instructional (vs. procedural) matters - an orientation in the school not preoccupied with simply "running a smooth ship" and "keeping the lid on"
4. Programs and Instruction	- a strongly academic curriculum - student grades based on a relatively large sample of student work
5. School Culture and Ethos	- a low incidence of physical accidents and injuries and verbal disputes - a high level of respect for the personal possessions of others - a shared sense of ownership in the school building - a priority for the development of academic as opposed to athletic, social or work skills
6. School-Community Relations	- a positive image of the school in the community.

None of the items used to measure the Administrator component were significantly related to reduced dropout rates.

Table 3.4. Correlations Between Individual Items and Refined Measure of Dropout Rate
(Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, n = 58)

Model Construct	Individual Items[a]					Overall
	1	2	3	4	5	
Goals	0.33	-0.67	0.21	0.48	0.34	0.15
Teachers	-0.13	-0.58	-0.71	-0.38	-0.01	-0.62
Administrators	-0.06	0.05	0.20	0.15	0.06	0.12
School Pol. & Org.	0.49	0.14	-0.50	-0.32	0.05	-0.09
Prog. & Instruct.	-0.67	0.16	0.17	-0.50	-0.24	-0.65
School Culture	-0.69	-0.52	-0.17	-0.28	-0.66	-0.73
School-Comm. Rel.	-0.64	-0.09	-0.08	-0.03	--[b]	-0.62

[a] Correlation greater than 0.20 are significant at the 0.05 level. See Appendix E for specific items.
[b] This scale has 4 items.

Summary

Retention of students in secondary schools until graduation has been justified as a worthwhile goal on individual, social, and economic grounds. Most efforts to increase retention rates, however, assume that students must change: their valuing of the school experience, relationships with adults, orientation toward the experiences offered by the school, and the like. Our study, in contrast, accepted the view expressed by many dropouts that "there is something wrong with the school". We inquired into the ways in which schools might change in order to be a more engaging environment from the point of view of at-risk students. By "engaging" we did not mean "entertaining". We hypothesized that schools which were unusually effective in achieving the full range of academic and other goals characteristic of secondary schools would also be meaningful to students and that more of them would stay through graduation.

To test this hypothesis,the characteristics of an effective secondary school were identified from 20 empirical studies. The resulting model included 34 attributes or factors, each associated with one of seven components; relationships among the components were also specified in the model.

Teachers and administrators in 58 schools responded to a questionnaire that measures the seven components. Five different measures related to dropping out for each school were also computed. Statistical analysis suggested that the model explained at least 55 per cent of the variation in dropout rate across the 58 schools.

While these results provided support for our hypothesis, several unresolved problems limit the confidence that can be placed in the results. First, of the seven subscales in the questionnaire used to measure categories of school effectiveness, two had low reliabilities and one was unreliable. Individual item analysis identified the sources of this unreliability. Second, the questionnaire only sampled attributes of effectiveness identified in the literature review. Attributes not measured by the instrument may change subscale reliabilities and alter the amount of variation in dropout rate explained by the model.

Another unresolved problem evident in the results concerned the category of factors called Administrators. The weak contribution of this category of factors directly and through School Policies suggested in the path analyses, invite some form of explanation; these results are contrary to what was to be expected based on previous research. Taken as a whole, the attributes of administrator effectiveness measured in the questionnaire involve highly visible action in the way the school is run, as well as in the nature of classroom curricula and instructional practices. Such intervention may not be warranted in schools that have achieved high levels of effectiveness, in this case in retaining pupils. Indeed, such an interventionist image of administrative effectiveness has emerged largely from studies of principals faced with the task of "turning a school around" or improving a school serving disadvantaged students often with inadequate resources. As well, it may be that school systems have placed strong principals in schools perceived to have the greatest need for improvement. But these explanations are clearly speculative and demand systematic exploration.

Results of the study, in combination with its limitations, suggest several other useful directions for future research. One such direction involves continued research on the characteristics of effective secondary schools. The present study supports the potential of "school improvement" to provide a coherent focus for secondary school reform efforts. Such coherence, however, depends on developing a richer, more detailed model or models of effective secondary schools than is presently available; it also depends upon a better knowledge base. This view suggests the value of a research strategy which combines qualitative case studies of secondary schools known to be exemplary with large scale, quantitative studies of a confirmatory nature.

There are several, alternative definitions of the dependent variable in studies of effective secondary schools. The annual dropout rate was the definition used in the present study. Other definitions incorporate the academic, vocational, social and emotional goals aspired to for students. Subsequent research ought to be sensitive to which attributes of an effective schools model(s) contribute most to which outcomes. Previous studies have not provided this discrimination.

Results of the present study begin to provide a "...causal model of the dropout process" called for by Rumberger (1987, p. 111). However, it is not clear how much of the variance in dropout rate is explained by school-related factors as compared with other factors (e.g., student and family characteristics). Expanding the model, through further research, will be necessary if a comprehensive explanation of dropout is to be provided.

Finally, results of this study and future research which has been suggested are of little practical consequence without parallel knowledge about school improvement processes. This is an area of knowledge expanding rapidly at the present time (see, for example, Louis & Dentler, 1988) but worthy of support in parallel with continued research on effective secondary schools.

NOTES

1. See Appendix B, avilable on microfiche.

2. Included were Huddle (1986), Lightfoot (1983), Ford Foundation (1984), and Lipsitz (1984).

3. See Huddle (1986), Murphy & Hallinger (1985), Roueche & Baker (1986), Lipsitz (1984), Rutter et al. (1979), Ford Foundation (1984), Goodlad (1984), Madaus, Kellaghan & Rukow (1976), and Lightfoot (1983).

4. These studies include Roueche & Baker (1986), Huddle (1986), Lightfoot (1983), Lipsitz (1984), Coleman & Hoffer (1987), Ford Foundation (1984), and Rutter, et al. (1979).

5. Studies providing data concerning these issues included Harnisch (1987), Huddle (1986), Ford Foundation (1984), Lipsitz (1984), McNeil (1986), Goodlad (1984), and Rutter et al. (1979).

6. These studies included Lipsitz (1984), Roueche & Baker (1986), Huddle (1986), Lightfoot (1983), Coleman and Hoffer (1987), Keith & Page (1985), Arehart (1979), Goodlad (1984), Walberg & Shanahan (1983), Harnisch (1987), Murphy & Hallinger (1985), Morgan (1979), and Frederick et al. (1973).

7. See Lipsitz (1984), Roueche & Baker (1986), Huddle (1986), Murphy & Hallinger (1985), Goodlad (1984), Rossman, Corbett & Fireston (1985), Rutter et al. (1979), Coleman & Hoffer (1987), Lightfoot (1983), Ford Foundation (1984), and Gunn & Holdaway (1986).

8. See Huddle (1986), Ford Foundation (1984), and Lipsitz (1984).

9. The operational definitions for the five key dimensions developed for this study are as follows:

Grade levels used in the baseline population: In this study the baseline population for a school included students classified by the school as being in in Grades 9 through 12 who were within the defined age range;

Age range of students who can be classified as dropouts: Only students between the ages of 14 and 21 were included in the baseline population;

Length and dates of the accounting period for which rates are calculated: The accounting period in this study was the 12-month period from October 1 through September 30 of the following year; credits earned for grade classifications were therefore as of September 1, so that summer school credits could be used for graduation in the academic year just completed;

Allowable time period for unexplained absences: In this study a dropout was a student belonging to the baseline population who left school without receiving a diploma and for whom no other publicly funded school has requested his or her academic records. In Ontario, a student who has been absent without excuse for 20 consecutive school days is dropped from the roles.

Setting used to identify acceptable alternative education: Only transfers as full-time students to other publicly funded diploma granting schools, counted as transfers; excluded were evening school programs, adult continuing education centres, entering the armed forces, and marriage. Those who had moved to other provinces or countries, or who moved to private schools, were counted as still enrolled in school since it was not possible to determine their exact status. Their numbers were very small relative to the numbers who left school altogether and who remained in Ontario.

10. All data were keyed into a data file for computer analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences-X (SPSS-X) and LERTAP. The latter program was used to calculate Hoyt estimates of reliability for all measurement scales. Varying from 0.0 to 1.0, the Hoyt estimate provides an index of a scale's internal consistency. SPSS-X was used to aggregate data to the school level and to calculate means, standard deviations, percentages, and path coefficients. To calculate scale scores at the school level, item means were calculated for all valid responses and then items were summed. By this process, the problem of missing data was minimized and complete data sets were available at the school level for all independent variables.

Path analysis was selected to analyse the relationships between process and output variables because it provides a method of testing the validity of causal inferences for pairs of variables while controlling for the effects of other variables. In addition, path diagrams provide heuristic portrayals of systems of relationships which are well suited to the systems framework used to organize the variables in this study.

Two analytic techniques were used. The first follows the practices advocated by Goldberger (1970). In particular, the path coefficients presented here are the standardized regression coefficients resulting from regression of the dependent variable in question on those variables directly affecting it, and those alone. In cases where there is only one predecessor variable, the path coefficient is identical to the zero-order correlation coefficient; in other cases it is equivalent to the partial correlation coefficient of the dependent variable on the standardized predecessor variable controlling for other variables directly affecting the dependent variable.

The amount of unexplained variance in any dependent variable X_i is assumed to be accounted for by hypothetical "error" variables denoted by e_i. The correlation between e_i is equal to $1 - R^2$ where R^2 is the multiple correlation between X_i and all predecessor variables directly affecting it. Not all relationships in a path analysis are analysed. First, those relationships for which no causal inferences are plausible may be omitted. Second relationships between exogenous variables are typically unanalysed, though they are sometimes controlled for if they are considered to interact with one another. Finally, correlations among the e_i are assumed to be zero and remain unanalysed.

This method of path analysis required three principal assumptions which may or may not be valid. First, all relationships were assumed to be linear; second, relationships were assumed to be additive; and third, it was assumed no interaction (i.e., multiplicative effects) existed among variables. As well, some authors would hold that the variables are assumed to be measured on a ratio scale with some fixed unit of measure.

Data were also analyzed using the LISREL VI analysis of covariance structure approach to path analysis and maximum likelihood estimates (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1981). Using LISREL, path models can be specified and the influence of exogenous (not influenced by other variables in the model) variables corresponding to independent constructs on endogenous variables corresponding to the dependent construct can be estimated. Parameters (regression coefficients) can be estimated to assess the extent to which specified relations are statistically significant. Such parameters are meaningful to the extent that models can be shown to fit the data. A given model is said to fit the data if the pattern of variances and covariances derived from it does not differ significantly from the pattern of variances and covariances associated with the observed variables.

11. Hoyt estimates of reliability and the number of items in each subscale are given in Table 3.5 below.

Table 3.5. Reliability of Measures of Factor Categories

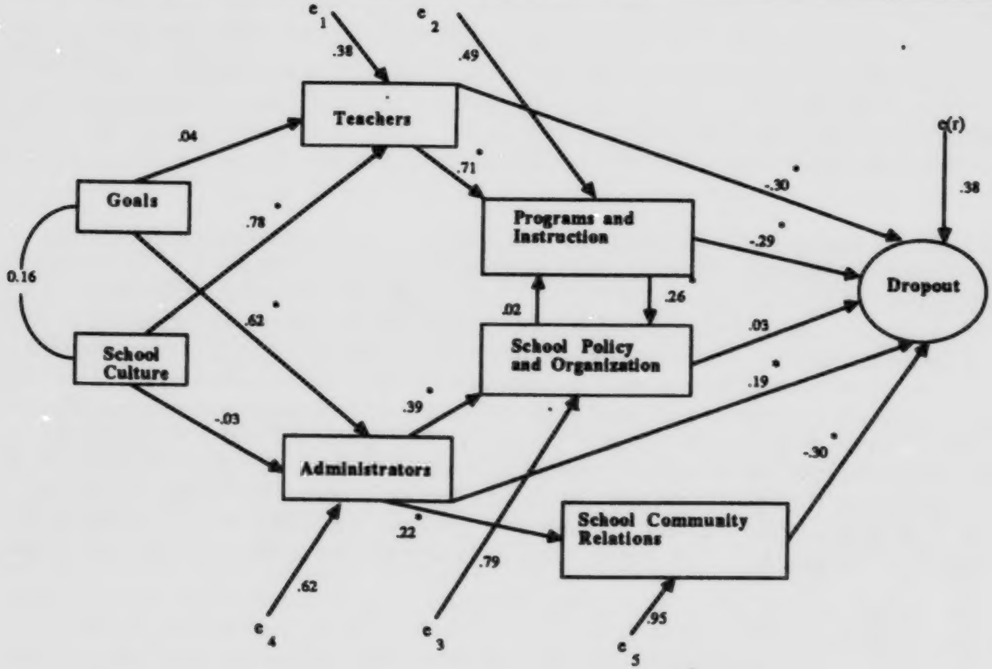
Category of Factors	Number of Items	Hoyt Estimate of Reliability	Mean	S.D.	Range
Goals	5	0.70	2.65	0.19	1 - 4
Teachers	5	0.53	3.16	0.16	1 - 4
Administrators	5[a]	0.69	2.91	0.30	1 - 4
School Policies and Organization	5	0.00	2.85	0.12	1 - 4
Programs and Instruction	5	0.36	3.03	0.15	1 - 4
School Culture	5[b]	0.52	2.85	0.21	1 - 4
School-Community Relations	4	0.31	2.99	0.19	1 - 4

[a] Counting sub-items increases the total to 14 items.
[b] Counting sub-items increases the total to 11 items.

12. The LISREL VI analysis of covariance structure approach to path analysis and maximum likelihood estimate (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1981) provides the results in Figure 3.3. This analysis confirms the pattern of results displayed in Figure 3.2 although there are some differences. The direct effect on dropout rate of Teachers and School-Community Relations was observed to be weaker, and the direct effect of Administrators becomes statistically significant. Using the refined dropout measure, 62 per cent of the variance in dropout was explained in this analysis. This higher proportion of explained variation is attributed to the estimation of both direct and indirect effects in the LISREL model. These results are reported in Table 3.6. As Figures 3.2 and 3.3 suggest, most of the variance in dropout rate explained by the model is attributable to the direct and indirect effects of Teachers and Programs and Instruction and the direct effect of School- Community Relations. Goodness of fit indices suggest the need to continue to improve the model (GFI = 0.756; AGFI = 0.325; RMSR = 0.236) although such further analysis is beyond the scope of the present chapter.

Table 3.6. Estimates of Direct and Indirect Effects of Model Constructs on the Refined Measure of School Dropout Rate

Model Constructs	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects	Total Variance Explained
Goals	--	0.06	0.06	0.001
School Culture	--	-0.40	-0.40	0.16
Teachers	-0.30	-0.20	-0.50	0.25
Administrators	0.19	-0.05	0.14	0.02
School Pol./Org.	0.03	0.00	0.03	0.001
Prog. & Instruction	-0.29	0.01	-0.28	0.08
School-Comm. Rel.	-0.30	--	-0.30	0.09


e_1
.38
e_2
.49
Teachers
.04
.71*
.30*
$e(r)$
.38
Goals
.78*
Programs and Instruction
-.29*
0.16
Dropout
.62*
.02
.26
School Culture
School Policy and Organization
.03
.19*
-.03
.39*
Administrators
-.30*
.22*
School Community Relations
.79
.62
e_4
e_3
.95
e_5

* $p < 0.05$

Figure 3.3. Path Analysis Model for Explaining Dropout Rate

(n = 58; LISREL path model using Maximum Likelihood Estimates)

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CHAPTER 4

IDENTIFIABLE THEMES IN THE PROCESS OF DROPPING OUT

Since the purpose of the study was to identify factors that might be changed in order to reduce the number of students who leave school before completion, it seemed reasonable to take an inside look at high school, and to identify and describe how it is that some students drop out. This activity was in keeping with the intention of the research team to focus on school-related issues, over which some control might be exercised, rather than on large social and economic concerns which affect all of society but over which individual schools and school boards see little influence.

The idea that dropping out was a process extending over time, involving more than a simple decision to leave, was made clear from extensive initial readings and independently confirmed from information gained in two exploratory visits to high schools. These visits included interviews with senior board staff, principals and vice-principals, teachers and students, as well as informal observation around the schools -- a pattern that was to continue throughout the study. The fact of the process and much of the detail was also confirmed from informal interviews conducted at random with adolescents in suburban malls. Prevalent among many of the teaching staff as well as some of the students was the opinion that while in the cases of some young people leaving might be considered as a failure of the system to provide, it might be seen in others as a mature course of action.

It is acknowledged that pre-existing social and economic conditions have enormous impact on how students see school and their place in it. This chapter, however, will address these only as they impinge on the consciousness of individual members of schools -- both students and teachers -- as students consider leaving school or as people explain how particular adolescents have done so.

Important for this section were the studies based on ethnographic data -- the studies of schools themselves, whether or not their chief concern was the issue of dropping out. These readings, some of which are listed in the Notes below, set the stage for the lively, stubborn, and challenging institutions encountered.

Methodology

Site studies and questionnaires were the two main sources of data for the focus on the process of dropping out. Site study data were obtained from half- to one-hour interviews with students and members of the teaching, counselling, and administrative staffs of the same seven secondary schools described in Chapter 2.

Interviewers used guidelines created from three sources: first, a wide variety of literature on adolescence, school organization, and school experience; second, from specific concerns nominated by members of the study team, and third, from input gained at preliminary interviews of staff and students of two secondary schools. A general observation guideline, created from the same sources, was also used.

Questionnaire data were primarily those of two open-ended sections of the instrument described in Chapter 3. For a complete explanation of study methodology, and samples of Interview and Observation Guidelines used in the site studies, see Appendix E, available on microfiche.

The Schools

As a Group

Based on responses to an initial screening questionnaire sent to all secondary schools in six boards, three pairs of schools and a single school were selected. Pairs of schools were chosen for their similarity on certain features and dissimilarity on others. The single school selected (School 1A) was the only secondary school serving its community, and therefore of interest as an enclosed system.

Pairs were similar in population size, socio-economic status of the catchment area, grades taught, range of programs, and number of extra-curricular activities offered. Pairs differed considerably on at least three of the following measures: number of suspensions since a given date; number of students dropped from the rolls, excluding transfers, since a given date; number of students transferred since a given date; and number of students absent on a given date.

The three pairs differed in the programs offered and the approximate income level of the students' families in the catchment area. Schools 2A and 2B offered basic programs (Grades 9 to 12) to students identified as Middle Third income level, and a limited number of general courses was also given at 2A. Schools 5A and 5B offered basic, general, and advanced programs (Grade 9 to OACs) to students identified as Middle Third income level. Schools 4A and 4B offered general and advanced programs (Grade 10 to OACs) to students identified as Upper Third income level.

Individually

1/A. School 1/A is set in an area of northern Ontario where a small population is spread over a large space. It is a seasonal playground for city-dwellers from the south, and the centre of related service industries. A few of the students who live in town walk to school, but most are bussed in from the surrounding areas, which are seen with serious humour as several rivalrous communities. Until students have access to a car, which may not be until the end of high school (if at all), friends may only see each other during school hours. Therefore school is the centre of students' lives during their adolescence.

The social structure of the community is represented in the school, with financially better-off students seen to be taking advanced courses, others taking general or basic. There are shop courses, but these have decreased both in popularity and in time alloted them (reduced from three periods per day to two.) Some of the students graduating from this school go to university, some to community college, and some remain in the community. It has been said that university and college graduates wish to return home here, and do so as soon as a suitable opportunity for employment presents itself.

2/B. School 2/B, set in a residential community of an urban centre, communicates its mission visually. In mosaic tiles on the walls surrounding the building are large depictions of manual tools, most of which are out of date in the world of employment. There is an air of spartan simplicity and cleanliness inside the school, which was built in the early 1960s and is reminiscent of the Stratford Festival Theatre.

Basic programs are offered here to boys who are seen as unable to handle a comprehensive school, or who may choose to come here to learn a trade. Students are usually those who were already held back for more than one year in elementary school and would have had to repeat Grade 8, or who have been IPRC'd, (i.e., assessed by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee for special education placement) or who have had severe attendance or behaviour problems previously in their school career which have held up their progress. Rather than being promoted, many are essentially transferred here. Good behaviour, good attendance, and some effort are the requirements, and will result in the granting of a diploma at the basic level. There are no general courses given and some boys indicated they wanted and thought they could handle general programming.

Administrative staff stress the fact that boys from this school are almost assured of employment after completion, sometimes before completion, and this is not seen as failure, since the school's mission is to make the boys employable--in their field of training or otherwise. Bricklaying and autobody are two shops from which boys may seek employment. In some shops, such as auto mechanics, equipment is very much out-of-date and not likely to be replaced, because technology is advancing so rapidly as to make adequate upgrading impossible.

2/A. School 2/A serves girls described by the above delimiters. Here, there is very little pretense that any trade will be taught. But it is the principal's philosophy that each of these girls, who have "failed and failed and failed" repeatedly in their school careers, should finish high school. Every opportunity is made to reward attendance and effort with that all-important course credit, and at the end of four years, a diploma. There is a great deal of individual teaching here and no course is so demanding that it cannot be tailored to the needs of the individual girl. A few courses are given at the general content level, but are taught basic style, by which teachers mean that it is adapted to the individual, and taught one-to-one.

The school is clean and pretty and kept smoke-free not by threat of punishment but by patrols of the administrative staff. The principal has instituted an infant to preschool day-care centre for the children of adolescent mothers and adult women returning to be students of the school. This must be seen as a godsend to those struggling to complete their education and rear children at the same time.

5/B. School 5/B is set on a main street in an urban setting outside a large metropolitan area in the south of the province. Considered unfortunate because of its high visibility and "bad reputation," the school has undergone real transformation of population over the past several years. Its catchment area presently includes very high-cost homes as well as low-rental, and it is the low-rental which is seen as currently attracting immigrants from various parts of the world, most notedly from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and South and Central America. The teachers are a friendly bunch and see each other frequently in the staff room. Apparently, the lack of office space at this 35-year-old building has had a positive effect in the communal use of staff areas for socializing as well as planning program.

In the word of one student interviewee, the halls are a "rainbow" of skin-tone and dress, and the languages heard are various and expressive. The variety is a challenge and some members of the staff are uncomfortable with the personal styles of some student groups. The "no cap" rule (no hats in the halls or classrooms), for example, affects youth of Jamaican background almost exclusively. As well, staff tend to view racial groups as homogeneous, even though the students clearly differentiate themselves. Canadian- and British-born Black students distinguish themselves from those born in the Caribbean; and both of these distinguish themselves from recent immigrants from Africa. Similar distinctions hold among Oriental and East Indian students.

5/A. School 5/A stresses school citizenship, and is seen by many to reflect its people-oriented principal. Even students working hard for marks, concerned about acceptance to the university course of their choice, devote much of their time to extra-curricular activities. The local population of southern Europeans has been somewhat displaced in recent years by an upwardly mobile population buying the newly built moderate-to-expensive houses. Most students are White, well dressed, and enthusiastic. Other students here representing cultures from all over the world tend to share style, and to a significant extent the values, of the dominant group.

Administrators and teachers take their hall supervision duties seriously and are visible and friendly presences, conversing with students even as they block certain paths from entry. An increasing number of students from this school go on to university, and the universities they select are those favoured by top Ontario students from other schools.

4/A. Set in a suburban area close to a mall, school 4/A was one of the last to be built by an expanding board in the late 1960s. With areas for small and large classes and ample office space within departments for planning and group meetings, its open-plan architecture was considered the last word in school plant. Its population is presently upper-income and multi-ethnic, with large concentrations of Jewish and Chinese students, and a significant representation of Black students. Virtually all of these students go on to higher education, usually university.

The school begins at Grade 10 and most courses must be given at the advanced level to attract clients -- there is no basic program, and few general courses. Students in the halls look varied in their dress, mature, confident, and privileged. The multi-racial mix is celebrated, but there is also evidence of a wish to blur distinctions and integrate newcomers into a commonality.

4/B. School 4/B is on a main street in the same board as 4/A, and was built in the 1950s. The community is essentially the same as that of 4/A, but with a greater concentration of homes at the upper end of the scale. Several years ago the school was losing students to those with semestered programs and those reputed to have less rigorous standards. The staff saw the community as overly intrusive in school matters, and a new principal was brought in who both strengthened the gate-keeping role of administration and made some changes in program. He created SEM-TRAD (whereby courses are offered in both semestered and traditional modes) and changed the basis of the grades, effectively raising all the marks to allow students to be more competitive with those from other schools. The school now suffers from over-crowding and there are portables in the back.

Virtually all students go on to university from this school. If their grades are not sufficient for entry to the programs they want, students are known to take the same course again, sometimes twice more, either at this school in the same or a different mode, or at evening or summer classes, or by correspondence. The school co-operates actively with parental demand that every break be given their children.

Findings/Themes

Process

Important to the explanation of students dropping out of school is the understanding that leaving is a process occurring over time, rather than a simple decision to stay or go. Although at the end a severance occurs, the "decision" has been made earlier in small and large ways again and again, and the final break is more of an acknowledgement than a turning point.

To make this acknowledgement is a breakthrough for some young people--finally to be taking charge of themselves and their lives. And because school re-entry is made easier at the present with course semestering, and evening, summer and correspondence classes, many of those who leave do come back and complete their high school education. This was the view in most of the literature, and the view we met in schools.

Counsellors particularly decried the fact that they might not hear that a student was leaving until long after he or she had gone -- too late to say or do anything -- but acknowledged that the signs were there earlier. The signs are explained below as "themes" in the long process of dropping out of school.

Themes

The ten themes outlined below were created from information available in the literature and from two exploratory school visits, then tested and confirmed during the first site visit. The themes were then used to summarize processes in schools that emerged from our observations and interviews with staff and students.

They speak to the processes involved in school-leaving, but they speak also to the larger issues of school life as these are embedded in the rich soil of Ontario society. Easy tinkering cannot change centuries of expectations, even if change were the chief wish of collective society -- which it is not.

Further analysis of the data within the ten themes revealed a clustering of themes around four larger issues. These issues or foci are outlined below, and their themes listed. Still further below, each theme is described and explored.

First are the School System Themes: tracking & sorting, negotiation, accreditation and response. These relate to the system which the student finds when she or he arrives at high school from either Grade 8 or 9. It is the essential procedural context of high school -- how courses are taken, credits gained, people tracked, and so on.

Second are the Social Themes: identity, interests, and attendance. These are themes which relate to the adolescent social setting which forms the "other" context in high school.

Third are what we have termed the Butterfly Themes: sexuality and labouring. These are themes which relate to the manifestation of the adult forming from the child.

Fourth is the Main Process Theme: becoming marginal. This relates all themes to each other and to the manifestation of dropping out, which is defined as leaving school before completion of diploma requirements.

Each of the foci, and the themes within, are elaborated, explained, and illustrated below.

School System Themes (1 to 4)

These themes relate to the system which the student finds when she or he arrives at high school from either Grade 8 or 9. They form the essential educational and procedural context of high school -- how courses are taken, credits gained, people placed in ability tracks and so on. They speak of the relationship of the school system to the education of students.

Much has been made in recent times in various literatures about the process of tracking students into basic, general, and advanced courses. It is teachers' perception that students are far more demoralized and likely to drop out if they are placed in classes where they clearly cannot cope with the work, and must daily confront their failure in front of their age-peers.

Important also to a proper understanding of the effects of the school system is how students and teachers negotiate the terms of a general vs an advanced course, and how these terms will be particular to the setting, making the delivery of the same programs different in different schools.

The process of "gathering credits,"as opposed to "being in a grade" is also important as a departure from the previous experience of those entering Grade 9, and a factor in disaffection if students begin to fall behind their age-grade peers. In addition to those provided by each school, available options for course-gathering (e.g. evening, summer, and correspondence courses) necessitate some planning on the part of students and their families, and may be seen to help most those who are already making the larger system work for them.

The degree of welcome a student feels in the building, related to how school personnel respond to the specifics of student behaviour, must also be seen as related to the process of dropping out. Rejection, especially at the unsure age of adolescence, is keenly perceived and arrow-sharp. Who would choose to remain where one is not wanted?

1. Tracking and Sorting

> *Procedures the school uses to acknowledge and work with the differences in the student body:* [1]

Formally and informally, schools placed students in ability tracks and proceeded both to teach and treat them according to their program. Students were recommended in Grade 8 or 9 for basic, general, or advanced programs in the appropriate schools, and these placements were difficult to change in any direction but down. Staff at the vocational schools were reluctant to lose students to the local composite. Students achieving A's in general courses were not always allowed to transfer into advanced.

Even within tracks, students were sorted for ability. In the vocational schools, reading level in Grade 9 was the determining factor. In one of the collegiates, where most students took advanced courses, the two methods of course delivery (semestered and traditional), were seen as suiting students of different capabilities. A higher tier of program delivery (enriched), for which one had to be recommended, was also offered.

Teachers were often seen both to favour the achievers and to spend more in-class and after-school time with them than with those requiring help. Almost every student interviewee reported that teachers played favourites, and often named a top-performing student as the type to be favoured. At the boys' vocational school, one student held the job of shop foreman in each of his classes and was always the one sent to the store for equipment. In the composite schools, teachers were seen to award more privileges to advanced level students, fewer to the general level students and almost none to those in basic. Many students reported teachers spending extra time in class with those who were going to get 90's anyway.

Teachers of top-level students were themselves seen as favoured in the school. Whatever the ability range of the school, the better teachers were very often "rewarded" with better classes. Where this did not happen--for example at the collegiate where the head of physics taught a general class each semester, this was acknowledged as a departure from the usual.

Teachers cited the match between student capability and student placement as critical to student success. The principal of one school regularly warned parents that if their child unwisely chose advanced courses, it would take him extra time to complete school should he have to drop down to general. Many teachers at the collegiates and comprehensive schools commented disparagingly on those parents who insisted their children take advanced courses even when the school staff saw them as unlikely to do well in these placements.

There was also the concern that students misplaced were likely to become problems in both the behavioural and academic spheres. One long-time teacher saw the main function of his vocational school to be the segregation of incapable students so they would not be a distracting influence to others. A teacher of chemistry spoke of the problem of having to spend extra time motivating poorer students enrolled in the advanced courses, and how this tended to sap the excellence of the program.

Some teachers saw the main differences between students in general and advanced courses as the ability of the latter group to work independently and their willingness to do homework. Others saw the differences in terms of learning styles. Still others saw variations in intellectual ability. But whatever the criterion, the differences were seen as real and unlikely to change without a great deal of effort and desire on the part of the student. Streaming was seen by virtually every teacher as necessary and useful, and the suggestion that this process be eliminated (without a concurrent and massive increase in funding) as frivolous and lacking in fundamental understanding.

Public opinion was acknowledged to favour the more prestigious advanced program, and the theoretical rather than the technical courses. In the composite schools and collegiates, the advanced program was most often selected as the student's first choice. In composite schools, staff reported the shrinkage of the technical program in recent years--in the number of students who were selecting tech courses, in the number and types of courses offered, and in one school, in the time devoted to rotational shop (down to two periods a day from three.) This perspective extended even to advanced students taking some tech courses in their program. One senior boy, the winner of a regional science fair for his insect-like robot, described how his efforts as technical director of a stage play had been overlooked by everyone, while those of the other two directors (music and book) had been widely applauded. Nor had his success at the fair been properly acknowledged.

Advanced courses were filled with students from wealthier families, whose parents demanded university-entrance courses for their children. Parents most powerful and most knowledgeable about the school system were seen as less likely to go along with teachers' recommendations if these differed from their own. The two schools in the highest socio-economic areas offered no basic and only a very limited number of general courses.

In sum, school did not present the same face to all students. Some were made more welcome than others, for reasons that went beyond academic ability and achievement. In communities where parents were blindly supportive of the school, or where parents were not as knowledgeable of the paths possible through high school, families were less likely to make demands on behalf of their children, more likely to go along with whatever recommendations were made by the teaching staff.

Such recommendations, however, when examined within the wider context of all available options, could not always be seen to maximize the possibilities for every individual. As the system is presently structured, the success of those in the most academic programs depends upon the removal of less-academic students to other buildings or other classrooms.

Regardless of the face put upon programs for these "other" students, their lack of status could not fail to rankle, and unless the offerings of their specific programs were seen by the students as useful, this rankling dissatisfaction could easily lead to dropping out.

But the other side of the same coin was that a student unsuitably placed could find it a very tiring battle to be always working for marks and very rarely meeting success. Leaving school in order to take a job might promise to be a rest after this.

2. Negotiation

Informal arrangements in school and class that tend to mediate the more formal procedures of course and class placement: [2]

Negotiation was seen to be a feature of every setting where there were staff and students. The most obvious examples would be those in class where this took the form of dialogues on issues such as when a test would be given, what homework would be assigned, and how papers had been graded. Students in advanced level courses usually saw themselves as able to influence teachers, and could outline a procedure they would follow to do so. On a private matter such as a grade, the usual method was to see the teacher after class, not confront him in front of the others, to be very polite in stating one's case and so on, and if this failed, to go to another staff member, counsellor or vice-principal to discuss it. On group matters, one would try to get everyone in class together in one opinion and try to get the teacher to see the justice of it.

Certain students, very often those in general courses, less frequently saw themselves as able to influence teachers, and many were at a loss to describe how they might try to do this. On a group matter, while they might gather opinion around them, they did not feel they could have much of an impact on staff. Students were resigned, for example, when a petition with hundreds of signatures protesting the impeachment of the student council president, whom they saw as one of their own, was ignored by staff. This resignation seemed characteristic of students seen as "out of favour" in the schools.

There was, however, a certain set of givens related to general students, one of which was the understanding in some places that homework would rarely be assigned. When these were breached, there was much cause for verbal dialogue with the class so that students knew specifically what they were being promised in return for doing homework.

Bargaining took various forms, such as discussions, informal agreements, performance contracts, punishments, exhortations, ultimata, pastoral chats, speeches of encouragement and so on. The quantity and style varied considerably also. Whereas one school favoured the pastoral approach, and staff were seen to counsel students into doing what was the right thing to do, in two others the official policy was no negotiation, unless good cause was shown, which did occur. In one school, teachers believed negotiation entailed giving up ground, which everyone did--daily. Two schools made evident and available to students the very process of negotiation, so they had the means to access their "rights."

At the heart of each bargain was an agreement, sometimes articulated and sometimes not, delineating what the school had to have from the student in return for the continued granting of belonger status. The overall message was: "learn what we expect of you...and there is something here for you," but the specific agreement in each school was different.

At the boys' vocational school it was summarized by the vice-principal as "Buy into the system," and can be described as follows: Behave yourself. Come to class on time, don't skip off, show that you're making an effort--and you'll get your class credit. If you stay for four years, you'll have your diploma at the basic level. There will be a job for you--possibly in your chosen trade--when you leave. As a working adult, you'll be able to buy what you want, and do what you want.

At the girls' vocational school the bargain was stated by the principal: "Come to school, come to class," and might be summarized as follows: You need that diploma. If you come every day and show that you're making some effort, you'll get your credit. In four years you'll have your diploma, and when you're mature enough to get a job, you'll be able to show that you've completed high school. And if you want further training, you'll at least have some direction.

At the composite schools, especially in the small community where the range was greatest and options fewest, the deal was toughest: "Behave as we wish." School is a privilege. And if you want that privilege you have to earn it. Follow the rules here and you can stay and complete your high school. Misbehave, and we can and will put you out. Some but not all of you will want higher education, and we control access to it. You have to get through us to get ahead.

In a racially mixed school a major bargain with one of the student groups seemed to be: don't threaten us...behave in class, don't get violent, and we won't challenge you. We expect less of you, so you can get easy credits in general courses, though you're not putting out much effort, especially if your class behaviour is decent.

At the collegiates, the agreement needed to remain in these as opposed to other schools was: Work hard, stay interested, and get those marks. Students not doing well should work harder on their motivation. Those of you classified as "special" or taking general courses should continue to make an effort and get extra help, and perhaps in time you will do better. We will (i) make evident the grading scheme in order to show you how to obtain the best marks, (ii) give you every opportunity to do your best by offering a variety of courses, and a variety of ways to take the courses, and a lot of extra help from teachers, and (iii) help you get to the university of your choice.

Privately, the student also had to understand what she or he was giving up in order to be given the privilege of gaining what the school offered. Remaining in the vocational schools required that students give up the vision of themselves as regular students of a composite school, something many of them spoke of with longing. In composite schools, students who felt more capable than the school allowed, and had been placed lower in the hierarchy than they thought they deserved, had to divert their feelings of personal excellence for a time. The pride of these people was often transferred over from their coursework to their clothing and manner, or their outside job. At the collegiates, students more or less gave up any desire they might have had for a young, committed teaching staff, some excitement in learning, and coherence in the student body. And everyone had to set aside, at least for a time, a certain freedom of personal action and thought.

In sum, in each setting, retention of students seemed likeliest when behavioural and performance agreements were seen as positive and beneficial by most students.

Extreme flexibility of standards in course-work might be seen by staff as working against excellence in subject matter. Extreme flexibility in behavioural standards might be seen as having lost control of the school to an unruly mob. At the extreme of least flexibility, however, was the clear message of exclusion given to those students who could not or would not meet the standards, or who believed that remaining within the school would necessitate surrendering integrity for academic accreditation.

3. Accreditation

The gain and use of credits, the currency of high school: [3]

People inside high schools spoke of many ways of getting though the system, but also of some confusion. There were regular day-time classes in semestered and traditional modes, also evening classes, summer classes, and correspondence courses. Program delivery was available at the basic, general, advanced and in some places enriched levels. There were also other "special" designations.

Grade-level was no longer simple. Students answered the question of grade-level with a number corresponding to their age, and an explanation. A sixteen-year-old might say he was in Grade 11, "...but I'm taking courses at the Grade 10 (or 12, or OAC) level."

Older students also had the difficulty of explaining being caught between old (HS1) and new (OSIS) systems. While the old requirement of 27+6 credits was seen by most as corresponding to a four-plus-one year program, the new requirement of 30 credits was seen as corresponding to neither a five- nor a four-year program, but something like "four and a half."

In every school, students needed to be informed of all the possibilities for programs, timelines, and goal-achievement. In some schools, students could earn an extra credit per year by taking a class at lunch. In some schools, students unhappy with a particular final grade could, under some circumstances, take the class again. Students could drop a course before failing it and and take it again next semester. There were various procedures and permissions to obtain, and these had to be discovered and explored in order to maximize one's chances of getting through.

Some schools made this easier than others. Some seemed to be working for and with the student, helping each student maximize her or his chances. But the attitude of some, especially the composite schools, was that the path ought not to be made too easy, and if it were, the end result would be a lowering of school or provincial standards.

Since the advent of OSIS, neither schools nor parents have felt able to advise students, because procedural precedents are not yet established. When OSIS was new, the collegiates had suggested that the better students would "fast-track" by taking their 30 credits in four years. One girl spoke of her sister, who had done the 33 in four years, so why shouldn't she do 30? Except she had found it hard to do all 4 one semester, and was now going to finish the year one course short of completion. Now she was thinking fast-tracking had not been good. Because of the pressure to compete for marks over a short time-frame, she had missed out on a lot of fun activities. As the first group was nearing completion, staffs were also beginning to re-evaluate fast-tracking.

Doing the 30 in four and a half years demanded semestered courses, which were not available everywhere, and also left open the question of how to handle oneself in February, after high school completion. Should one enter university early? Should one work for half a year? Should one travel? Should one take extra courses to upgrade one's marks and increase one's chance of university acceptance?

One school did away with all pretense of fast-tracking, and refused also to accomodate part-timers. Here, one stayed in high school for five years, committed oneself to full participation in school life, and often graduated with more credits than one needed. This school had by far the best extra-curricular program we saw, but fewer Ontario scholars and fewer acceptances to university than two other schools.

Those who became most knowledgeable were those the system was already serving well. Students in the collegiates, who were all planning further education, were as well-informed as anyone we found elsewhere. Their schools and their families all accessed information and passed it on to them. Students in their OAC year were offered certain rights, such as the selection of courses and teachers and mode of program delivery. All told, the system was seen to work for the students, and not the other way around. In contrast, counsellors elsewhere were seen to act as gatekeepers, deciding whom and under what conditions a student would be allowed to take an evening course, when this option was offered easily by those at the collegiates.

Students who fell behind might not realize it until they saw students of their age-cohort leaving school. The question of how many credits students had was sometimes difficult to answer. Usually they had to think--how many courses had they taken in previous years, and did they miss any? Some at the vocational schools did not know how many credits they had and could not add them up, because in many cases their program had been broken by suspension, absence, and moves. Almost everyone, however, could say whether they were on track, ahead of the expectation (fast-tracking) or behind their age-peers. People at the vocational schools said, "I'm behind two years," meaning behind their age group. The concept of slow-tracking was offered by one school as a better alternative than the fast-tracking now possible under OSIS.

In this position, some could leave with others of their age, thinking to work and take the remaining courses at night, but never returning to do so. Those who were planning to leave before they had their 30 made alternate plans sound like their intentions, sometimes with embarrassment, sometimes with bravado. It might be just one or two courses they needed and their immediate plan was to work.

Alternatively, some could stay on and on and never get their diploma. One young man who was visiting his old high school proudly stated that it had taken him five and a half years to get his 27, and was now in Law Enforcement at community college. No doubt there were others who spent the time and never did complete the program.

In sum, proceeding at a acceptable pace, and accumulating the currency of credits at a reasonable rate, is seen as favouring the completion of high school. Where students fell far behind their age-peers and saw no chance of catching up, or where other currency (money) was deemed to be more valuable at the present, there were good reasons for leaving. Students who were denied information -- or misinformed about their options, or misadvised about what to take and how to proceed or simply left to their own devices by a school staff just as confused as they -- could make major mistakes that would take too many years to rectify. It is easy to see how students could become discouraged and simply quit.

4. Staff Response

> *Means and efforts employed by the staff to respond to the specifics of student behaviour:* [4]

There were several sets of ways to look at the issue of responsiveness. Schools differed both in the role and style of each of these ways, and also in the relative emphasis placed by the school on each.

One way to look at responsiveness was to look at the number and use of specific policies managing students in the building. Policy often detailed specific punishments, such as detentions and suspensions, for infractions such as lates, skipping, unruly behaviour, and so on. These behaviours were more of an issue in some places than others. In one school, meting out punishments for offences constituted almost the entire role of two vice-principals. In another, the principal said there were few rules, so few could be broken. Vice-principals in this school spent time helping students, and spoke of drawing up performance contracts with individuals. Whether expectations were implicit or explicit, students in every school had a clear understanding of what was allowed and what punishments would likely result from which infractions.

Lateness and attendance were two areas where differences in schools were very apparent. Whereas lateness was stringently policed in one school ("...two free lates are allowed each semester, after that there's a detention, after that...") lateness was not challenged in two others, where the consequence of missing work was seen as worse than a punishment.

One school used a machine to telephone and report daily absences to the parents, another demanded vice-principals phone home, but only after several absences. Both schools were dependent on teachers to keep an accurate record of attendance in every class, which was more likely to happen in some places than others. In some schools, vice-principals were reported happier when teachers forgot. Students might thus escape detection for some time, but when their absence finally came to notice, it was handled not as an issue for responsive counselling but one deserving of punishment.

Another way of looking at responsiveness was by looking at the role and style of counselling in the school. Whereas counsellors in some schools focused on academic and career matters, others were also available for personal counselling.

In the vocational schools, guidance and control were very closely related. There were no actual guidance counsellors. Instead, administrators were in frequent contact with law enforcement and social agencies regarding various students, and personal counselling entailed making society's expectations for behaviour clear to them. The principals and vice-principals of these schools were clearly devoted to their mission of saving as many kids as they could, and would tell tales of their successes to interested hearers.

The substance of counselling in the collegiates was the future, which necessitated program and career planning. Personal problems of students were more likely to be taken to family or private agencies than aired within the school.

The three composite schools were all different. Counsellors in one were united in a vision of helping the whole child in whatever way they could, and regularly initiated programs for student development. They were also in contact with the students through extra-curricular activities such as teams. At the other extreme were those excellent individuals who, without assistance from the office, were floundering in their attempts to build unity in school policy.

Examining the specifics of teacher behaviour in meeting the needs of students was another way to understand responsiveness. In the vocational schools, teachers were expected to place the needs of the students before those of course-work. As one teacher said, it was when he got going on the math and forgot about how the students were meeting it that he had most difficulty with them. Where course-work was critical, however, teachers described their plates as full. There wasn't always time to recognize and deal with a disaffected student. With the needs of so many students to attend to, with the demands of so many levels of governance to fulfil, with program requirements currently changing, and in some places with the demands of the community so frequently and forcefully confronted, there was little time and energy to keep pace with the mass, let alone the individuals. Some personal attention might be given, or the student could be directed to the counselling office. But it was really up to the student to understand and fit the demands of the system. Those who could would succeed and those who could not would have to try harder.

There were teachers in every school who saw their responsibility to students as extending outside of class. These were ones who coached teams or made extra time each week for meeting students and helping them with the work. They were the ones seen by students as approachable. One such teacher had befriended a young man on the occasion of his mother's attempted suicide, and was spoken of by this and other students as a teacher who really made a difference in people's lives. This teacher guessed the number of teachers on his staff who saw their school role as he did to be "maybe 10%."

Finally, responsiveness was examined as an overall direction in the school established by the principal. To what extent, did the school adapt to the concerns of the community? Some principals were finely tuned to the demands of the parent body (much to the opposition of some of the teachers), and were prepared to go to great lengths to accommodate them. Here, schools were seen to act in the interests of the individual.

In one such school, every student was informed of the grading scheme in every course. Since it was understood that virtually all students were university-bound, courses offered elsewhere only at the general level, such as Business English, were offered at the advanced. Many attractive course and delivery options were given students so they could maximize the likelihood of their success. The grade-grid had been raised to make the average mark a B and to make final year marks more competitive with those of other high schools. The counselling office was prepared to work through the best game plan with each and every student. Students were allowed to take courses over again to achieve a better mark.

At the other extreme were those schools where college and university were seen as preserves of the elite, and who took it upon themselves to "weed out" those deemed unsuitable for further education. At one of these, the entire group of final year students was subjected to a dressing-down from the principal because the mid-semester marks were "not high enough." At this school, the return of a top student for an entire semester to better his grade in one course was not seen to be unreasonable. No one here thought to recommend he upgrade over the summer or at night school.

The philosophy of the principal and the management approach taken on staff were visible in the very halls. Whereas food in the halls was punishable in some schools, in others everyone walked over the remains of lunch until the caretaking staff cleaned them up with shovels and brooms. While one school meted out a three-day suspension to anyone caught smoking on school property, another set aside a formal smoking area and tolerated an additional informal one. Some schools seemed to be more about people and their needs, and some were more about rules and their enforcement.

There was an agreement among schools that even where they had done their best, they were going to fail with some students. There was a general understanding that not everyone could, would, or should complete high school in one unbroken line. The way it was often put was, "Some students would benefit from having a semester or a year off ..." to work and grow up a little and re-evaluate their skills. Education would mean more to them when they came back, and they would be mature enough to handle it then. Most schools made it possible for students to return at a later date, although returning students sometimes chose to complete their high school requirements at another school.

In Sum, where students felt that they belonged in the school, where they perceived efforts made by the staff--sometimes just one teacher-- to respond to them in a real way, to understand them as individuals, and to care about how they were comprehending the work, here were students who wanted to stay. Students identified as "at risk" often reported not feeling close to a single teacher.

Schools which placed high emphasis on the achievement of every student, and mobilized resources toward this end, were likely to keep more of them.

Identification and punishment of rule-breakers, the chief function of vice-principals in some schools, must be seen as a long act of exclusion, especially when the invariable punishment for trivial offences is suspension.

Social Themes (5 to 7)

These are themes which relate to the adolescent social setting which forms the "other" context in high school. We hear endlessly about the so-called peer group, and peer group pressure. Students use these phrases themselves, often with meanings other than the ones adult intend. The phrases don't begin to describe the realities. Adolescent society is formless, yet fixed--a simple pecking order, and yet as complex as any other social organization, in which it is encumbent upon each to make one's presence felt ... to be special in some way ... to count.

For some young people, high school notoriety is the greatest acclaim they will ever have. For some, deciding what to wear in the morning and then piloting oneself through classes, halls, and cafeteria is a daily exercise in failure and endurance. Students unequipped emotionally to handle the taunts, jibes and jeers that are as much a part of high school life as books and examinations, may seek more welcoming locations outside of school within which to grow up.

5. Identity

The question of who you are, how special you make yourself,
and what you do in school: [5]

Students had to identify with some existing group, or create their own group, or be seen as "losers." There were identifiable groups in every school, and having no affiliation was the same as having no identity, which was tantamount to having no friends. It was extremely difficult to go through an ordinary day in high school with no friends. One might have trouble, for example, even entering school, since different groups were known to occupy different sections of the building.

Groupings in the student body were apparent in every school. The basis for grouping, however, varied from site to site. In the girls' vocational school, students spoke of two main groups -- those who looked normal ("regulars") and those who did not ("dummies"). Appearance did not always match achievement, so that it was quite possible for a dummy to perform better academically than a regular, yet still bear the ignominious label.

This was true everywhere -- labels were difficult to remove or change, and many were based solely on appearance. This was beneficial to some of those in vocational schools who had "failed and failed and failed," but took care of their appearance.

In the boys' school, students reported the acceptance of each other as belonging to one happy family, perhaps as they saw themselves together in lacking status. There were few variations in dress here, which they explained was because there were no girls to impress. There were, however, individual status differences acknowledged in the boys' possessions, since their backgrounds varied widely. Although some were from stable working- and middle-class homes, others lived with foster parents and some were living on their own. Some were simply slow children, others had had trouble with school and trouble with the law over the years.

Socio-economic status was apparent in all schools in the students' clothing and possessions. Even where the dress norm was ripped jeans and stretched out shirts, relative wealth might be displayed in accessories such as jewellery, leather vests and boots, and possessions such as watches and tape players. Students spoke of cars as a telling factor--make, model, year, and whether one received one as a present from parents or bought it out of earnings oneself.

In one school, family wealth was seen as the definitive factor in student social groupings. Students and staff acknowledged that community social structure could readily be seen in the schools, in the placement of students in basic, general, and advanced programs, (those from wealthier or more prominent homes went into advanced) in their extra-curricular activities (advanced students dominated the sports and teams the school was so proud of, either as players or as cheerleaders) and in the respect and latitude given (advanced students spoke of having enormous amounts of time free from class to participate in school events; general students spoke of teachers' favouritism for those in advanced.) Girls fit in in conventional ways at every level, and, as in the world at large, it was possible for a girl to become upwardly mobile by dating a boy in advanced, and hanging around with him and his friends.

In schools where there were few people who were racially different, these fit into groups at large. Where there were sufficient numbers, however, racial delineation of student groups was evident. In the cafeteria and the halls, and to some extent also classrooms, those of similar physical features gathered together. These were not necessarily exclusive groups, but they might become so if the numbers got so intimidating that lone outsiders felt overcome.

Another factor was country of origin. Canadian-born students might form friendships with those of similar racial features, but they saw themselves as separate from those of similar origins who were newer to the country. Canadian-born Chinese were separate in one school from Hong Kong immigrants. Blacks from the Caribbean did not associate with Blacks from Africa. Chinese students from Hong Kong formed a group separate from the Chinese from China. In every school, most student respondents could and did point out where in the caf, or describe where in the building, each of the groups could be found.

There were many exceptions, of course, including one girl of 19 who had left Vietnam by boat eight years earlier, and who refused to hang around with the Vietnamese students. Aside from her accent, which was heavy enough to give her away, her idioms and animation put her firmly in the North American kid culture, an association she relished, with no trace of reverence for an ancient past. There was a Black Elvis look-alike, complete with tight pants and greased back hair, who hung around only with whites of the same image.

Another means of student grouping was by dress, often to coincide with music identification. Attitudes were made visible in the details of clothing, accessories such as buttons or shirts with the insignia of performers, hair style and use of jewellery. Everyone in a particular school was able to discuss the recognition code for each of the groups represented there.

This was especially true of the "junior yuppies" or preps identified as the major group in one school. They were the most visible group in the school, and seemed to be over-involved in all school groups and activities, including student council, athletic council, rowing team, prefects, orchestra and so on.

Racial groups might themselves contain various groupings based on dress or music preference. As well, certain groups were known to cross the usual lines of colour or religion or music interest. These might be students who were old friends and had come up through school together and still had interests in common. They might be people newly attracted to one another for any of the various reasons that attract people to each other, or any new similarity -- recent arrivals to the country or the school, members of a school club or team, living in neighbouring homes, etc.

The important thing about identity was that one's image or group-recognition was a signal to others of various attributes. Excellence in school, for example, was seen in one school to belong to the a) Chinese b) East Indian students, and therefore a boy identified as a Rocker (wearing denims, leathers and long hair) couldn't possibly be getting 90's in Accounting, as he (an Indian) was--except he did. When interviewed, the Rocker described his affiliation, and separated himself from those known as "rock-ons," admitting at the same time how unusual he was, caring for achievement as he did, spending what little free time he had reading books, and wanting to be a lawyer. In other schools, not only were various ethnic groups identified for their academic excellence, their subject specialty was known -- for example, Chinese in math and science, Jews in humanities.

How one chose to affiliate, and whom one chose for one's friends, were critical. Through this identification came many different sorts of directions, including where one sat in the caf, where one sat in class, whether one participated in the lesson, whether one smoked, how one looked and what sorts of things one did for amusements. All of these were linked into "who" one was in school, including one's attitude to achievement.

In sum, in identifying with a group of people, in selecting who one's friends were, in making a self-identification, one was making important decisions about oneself and one's attributes now and in the future. An identification with people whose public image was the brag that they were not doing well in school, ("I had hundreds of skips last semester!") was an encouragement to dropping out when they did. As one boy put it after seeing his friend go, "..if he can do that, hey! so can I!"

There was also the danger, however, that those "losers" without friends (however academically capable) would feel so uncomfortable in the school that they would leave to find some other, more hospitable place.

6. Interests

Legitimate amusements in school and out: [6]

The extra-curricular program was of major importance in only two schools. In one of these, the school held a virtual monopoly over sports, clubs, and interests. In the school, "jocks" were the acknowledged leaders of the school--even girls' teams were called "Bluemen Girls." In the community, the very popular hockey teams were frequently coached by teachers. Many students believed places in teams were given to a selected few, frequently those in advanced level courses, often from the better homes. Some of the teachers acknowleged the possible truth of this. Chosen students themselves admitted their favoured status, and referred to this inner bunch as "wanting to make a contribution."

There were few alternative community resources that did not cost a great deal of money. Individual sports, such as skiing, were available in this paradise of nature, but at a cost estimated to be about $30 a day unless one had one's own equipment--too costly for those without jobs, as most of them were. "This place really needs a Y," was said by several interviewees.

In the other school where extra-curricular activities were important, the principal stressed the value of full citizenship, meaning full participation in school, from the time the students entered the building in Grade 9 right through to Grade 13. Staff were hired on the basis of their willingness to head activities and teams. Top level students filled places in teams, committees and clubs, and two thirds of the student body participated in at least one school activity, even if it was just attending the dances.

The domination of school activities by a select group was seen to be true in other schools also. As one principal put it, these were "la creme de la creme," but there were relatively few of them in most schools. Some estimated the percentage of participants to be as low as 10 per cent.

In urban areas, where there were many outside options for students' involvement, the school building was not the hive of after-hours activities that teachers remembered it once to be. There were interest groups and activties, but these were smaller. There seemed to be little school spirit now. Students' outside lives were often filled with work, individual- and family-planned activities, and membership in private clubs. In two such cases, schools reacted by running additional programs at lunchtime, and sometimes where necessary--for example, to keep an orchestra going all year--by giving credit for participation.

In the vocational schools, teachers implied there wasn't the necessary support for an after-school program, either from staff or from students. Boys who wanted to play football were allowed to join the team at the local composite school, a source of great pride because they could wear jackets from a better school. There were occasional games in the gym after hours. But it was a staff belief that for the 10 per cent that would join an organized program, it really was not worth the effort. In the girls' school, there was a tacit policy that students be allowed to leave school at 3 p.m. Students were said to have family responsibilities and did not have time after school. Extra activities were given at lunch or during last class of the day so students could participate.

Where students did participate, they tended to get very close to the supervising teachers, often closer to them than to any other teachers. Staff members and students alike discussed the importance of just these sorts of relationships as encouraging students in the activity, in school, and in life.

Some students in various locations were very involved in interests outside of school. Some did individual sports, such as skiing or tennis. Some had trained in an activity since their childhood and were now in a position to teach it. Swimming and gymnastics were mentioned. Some were volunteers working with children or the aged or as candy-stripers at a hospital. Those who reported these kinds of interests tended to be those who also displayed pro-school attitudes.

In sum, only where sports and clubs were closed to students once they left school was there an incentive to stay in school for the extra-curricular program. Most schools' extra-curricular program was not likely to keep students in danger of dropping out. Those at the lower end of the system (in vocational schools) and those at the lower end of schools -- i.e., those at greatest risk of dropping out -- were not those who were generally involved in the extra programs. Students at risk may never have joined anything, may never have felt they belonged to anything in the building.

Seniors who were "good citizens" and heavily into activities and teams and clubs might have been risking their university acceptance because they were so busy with all the extras. One girl who belonged to several clubs, teams, and groups could boast an 85% average, but knew she was two points short of the average required for the university and course of her choice the following year. A boy whose interests had caused a major drop in final year grades considered leaving school to be a better option than coming back and retrying courses just to raise his grades to the university acceptance level.

7. Non-Attendance

Alternatives to going to class and the patterns of skipping. [7]

The school building might be considered the centre of adolescent life, inasmuch as students met their friends there and excursions began from there. Being with friends rather than in class was very appealing though, and could become a far more attractive alternative. Everyone did it a little, braggarts inflated their total skips, and skipping was justifiably seen as disaffection made visible.

In every school there was a subculture of those who, for one reason or another, frequently chose not to attend all the classes for which they were timetabled. The attribution of these students' actions, and the treatments given them, differed from school to school. But generally these students were known to school staff, and believed to be "at risk" of dropping out. There were also those, and these were almost every student we interviewed, who admitted to cutting a class or two for one reason or another at some time during the school year. Skippers might be divided into those who usually skipped out of the building and those who skipped but usually stayed on school grounds.

When schools were located close to a fast food outlet or a mall, it was generally agreed by school staff that the public setting was a powerful magnet and acted as an alternative to going to class. In certain schools, administrators, and other personnel such as the public health nurse, made a habit of going out to such places and encouraging young people to come back into the school. This was easiest in the enclosed community, where the students and their families were known to the school and the habit of school control was established. But getting students back in for the day did not mean they would not skip again.

In other school areas, it was up to a wily administration to outwit potential skippers--to get the students in to school and to keep them there for the day, and for a long series of days, after which they might be granted their diploma. This was accomplished in the girls' vocational school by discouraging spares, and moving to a one-period, 40-minute lunch. There was time enough to get a good, nourishing meal in the school caf, but not enough to get across the street to the donut shop, where a sugar-high snack cost more than a school lunch. Nevertheless, the freedom of the alternative continued to attract some. For some students, anything outside the building was appealing. The boys in vocational school spoke of wanting to go anywhere they might escape the control of their teachers, or see girls, or wander around in public and not tell people where they went to school.

Smoking was also another reason why some students left school grounds, sometimes during class. In some schools smoking was not tolerated on school property at all. Others provided a place outside the building for smokers. But even when students were allowed to smoke in a special area of the school, many preferred to leave the grounds. Some preferred not to associate with those known in the school as "smokers" and some wanted the freedom not to be seen smoking.

For some, a half-day taken off from school might mean there was a party at a house where parents were away, or a group of people were going over to the local billiard and video arcade, or some were gathering to get drunk (or high) in a back field somewhere.

For some students, leaving school early some days gained them a few hours of extra work-time and more money in their pockets. Some students had family responsibilities for looking after the house and younger children, and took time off on occasion to handle some of the necessary tasks.

In most schools, students skipping class could be found in various locations around the school. In every school, the most popular of these was the cafeteria, ("the caf,") but other favoured spots were the library, the halls, the school store, the yearbook office, the student council office, and so on. In other words, any place where students felt at home and were likely to meet up with friends and others who had a legitimate spare or were taking one, was a potential refuge from class.

In each of these, moreover, school work might be taking place. Skipping wasn't always for the purpose of socializing. Students in the academic tracks of highly competitive schools reported skipping class on occasion to study for a test or to complete an assignment due in another class. They would be seen to be working in their usual haunts, and the class missed would be caught up from a friend within a day or two.

Finally, students at one school reported that many skipped any class given by a supply teacher. Work assignments left by the regular instructor on the chalk board would be copied down and completed later, because these were known to count toward the course mark. But students did not feel the need to sit in front of a teacher who would not be grading them, and under these circumstances could often be found in the hall.

There were those students who, for one reason or another, became more involved with what was happening outside of class than in, more attuned to the world beyond the school building than that within it. Sometimes there was a friendship group of adolescents who kept each other company in their new discoveries. Precedence was established among some such groups by the number of skips each could boast for the previous semester. Sometimes it wasn't intentional, but cutting got to be a habit. Then one's grades were in danger and then one's credits as well, and the way to feel better about it all was to hang out somewhere else.

In sum, the entire culture of cutting was a visible reminder that students were not always happy with the fact of having to be in school, that they could and would construct an alternative to going to class, and that if this alternative became strong enough, they were likely to be looking outside of school rather than inside for personal direction.

But dropping out could also be the unintended consequence of a slide which began with having skipped too many classes.

Butterfly Themes (8, 9)

These are themes which relate to the manifestation of the adult being formed from the child. Traditionally, high school students have been considered to be children long after they reached their full development. Schools held them in the building, captive and controlled, under the guise of teaching them--which may also have happened but did not necessarily follow. Recognition of changes in the nature of children, as well as changing mores, have moved some boards to allow more freedom to seniors.

But there are students of all ages who chafe at the petty restrictiveness of school, as it is so out of keeping with their new-found sexual power and the responsibilities they carry at home or at work. Many of these could complete academic requirements, if they were so inclined, but they may be pulled away before they do so by their new adult tendencies.

8. Sexuality

> *The emergence in school of social and physical relationships between girls and boys:* [8]

Human beings are sexual creatures. While it is not an explicit expectation of our culture that adolescents be sexually active, the hormonal changes, and the overwhelming pressure on young people to explore early the possibilities in this direction are tacitly accepted.

Sexuality was evident at school in students' attention to clothing, makeup and hairstyles, the music brought in on tapes, the posters put up in lockers, and the outright mimicry of media images--all emergent from a popular culture which schools cannot control.

Sexuality was also there in the ambiance of the high schools, where pairing was visible in class, in the halls, in the caf, and on school grounds. Students held hands, draped arms on shoulders, touched affectionately, and caressed openly. In the case of the girls' vocational school, pairing was visible at the front door early in the morning, at noon hour and after school, when boys would drop off or pick up girlfriends in their cars. There were no girls driving around to see the boys at their school, but some of these boys went across the street to see girls at the mall. Boys reported their greatest dissatisfaction with the school in the fact that there were no girls. Their dishevelled appearance was cited as evidence for the lack of care they gave these matters when there was "no one" to see them.

Teachers' reactions to obvious physicality varied considerably among and within schools. One thought of himself as being "like the Happy Days people," and was described by students as going crazy if he saw a boy and girl shake hands. Some teachers parted couples linking arms in the hall, others said nothing. We heard of no policy on the subject either way, but on the whole, there was a certain acceptance of its inevitability.

Where similarity of style and ethnic origin were the rule, mixed-sex friendship groups gave evidence for a theory of friendship based on eligibility for dating and marriage. Students reported friendships from elementary school to have changed in high school, so that all the Greek kids could be seen hanging together, all the Black kids, and so on. The exceptions proved the rule--people would say, "I'm Black, but I hang around with the Jewish kids," as though all Black students were expected to be together.

In most of the schools, partying on the weekends was accepted as part of the social scene. Here is a shortened version of how it was described by one girl, a graduating senior and soon-to-be university student. When you were younger, you might not notice what was going on, but as you got older, you would see signals between people, and envelopes and money passed in the halls or at lockers. You would be invited to parties--sometimes small (10 to 20 people), sometimes as huge as several hundred (in the case of a barn party) where there would be drugs and alcohol, sometimes with parents' knowledge of the alcohol. There was pressure to show up at the parties, and if one went, one tended to get involved in whatever was being done. Refusal was seen as repudiation, and there would be reprisals in school. She used to go, but could now use the excuse of seeing her boyfriend every weekend. Only two people in her crowd did not have fake I.D. to allow them to drink in bars. There was a known and simple way to obtain these official-looking but false papers.

Sexuality was seen by some as "something to do." In the isolated school we heard from girls that, "There's nothing to do here except park." In long-standing girlfriend-boyfriend relationships sex was presumed to occur, whether or not it did. Mistakes were known to happen and girls saw four options -- marriage, birth and keep the child or give it up, or abortion. Students discussed the rumours of these matters with a certain blasé attitude.

In every school, pregnancies were reported to have occurred. What differed was how these were handled by the young woman, her family and the school. In high socio-economic areas, students tended to manage the situation privately, and if news of the occurrence reached the school, it was usually as rumor. In the isolated area, one school was reported by students as having "the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the province," and there were young women visibly pregnant among the students. The girls' vocational school made a frank and useful accommodation to adolescent sexuality and to continuing education by setting up an infant-onward day-care centre in the building. It was run with the help of the young mothers, who were scheduled into the centre for one period every day to learn how to manage their children and "for bonding." The principal estimated that about ten girls a year became pregnant.

Sexuality was a kind of currency that provided some girls with upward mobility. Having a boyfriend was a sign of status, and girls in general programs who dated boys in the advanced program were considered to be moving up and becoming "snots" by those who were still "regular" girls in general. In the girls' vocational school, having a boyfriend was a sure sign that you were a regular and not a dummy, therefore everyone discussed their boyfriends in any conversation. Some girls also reported staying in school at the request of their boyfriends--so for them, sexuality was a bonus.

Love of learning was definitely not seen as sexy. In many places, it was not considered cool to be bright either for boys or girls. A bright person of either sex would have to define oneself in the midst of people who did not "approve" of brains or hard work. Even where public values favoured high marks and students were known to have the disease of "80-itis," there was still something uncool about showing that one was brainy.

In sum, unless each possessed a high level of individuation and willingness to appear different, and the necessary resources to handle an unexpected consequence, sexuality (and its social expressions) lead students along paths other than those ideal for academic accomplishment and high school completion.

The way back might not be apparent -- or available -- until after the individuals had left school.

9. Labouring

Working for pay. [9]

Some students worked to help support their families. One boy of 14 in Grade 9, the son of an immigrant family, was working thirty hours a week and was a necessary contributor to the household. It would be easy to see his breadwinning role expanding as he aged, leaving less and less time for his studies. Another boy, whose parents were apartment superintendents, had a list of chores which he performed before and after school every day, such as changing light bulbs in halls, emptying the trash bins and so on. They were able to count on him to help them run the building, and he in turn felt needed and responsible--far more there than at school.

Jobs were seen by some to be a privilege. In the isolated school, regular part-time work was a rarity. There were few of the after-hours shops or services that employ students elsewhere. Transportation home would also be a problem. Lodges might employ locals on weekends, if students could arrange transportation. Bush work in winter would take students away from school for days. Basically, jobs available to young people were the same before and after graduation. Some students were able to wait and others were not.

Many boys in basic-level programs, who had experienced life-long difficulty with school, saw work as something to be desired but out of their reach. Often they felt held back by the same limitations they experienced in school, and when offered were pleased to accept any kind of paid employment. Girls in similar programs, who appeared on the whole better groomed and more outwardly confident, seemed better able to get and keep a job. But of the eight jobs one of them reported, the best was working at a hamburger outlet--a job seen by most others as bottom of the barrel as far as pay and status went.

Since it was the objective at the boys' school to place students in jobs, early school-leaving to begin one's working life was seen not as a failure of the system but as a success. A part-time job was seen as a sign of success in the girls' school (although the value of a high school diploma was stressed) because it was a sign that the girls would be able to take care of themselves when they left school. The availability of other options (such as children and social assistance) was recognized, and so was the realism that some of them might never be self-supporting.

For most students in urban centres, there were many attractions in the world of work that school could not match. Many worked not to help their families, but to earn money to buy goods and commodities such as records, books, concert tickets, cigarettes, clothing, meals, and evenings out with their friends. Many full-time students worked almost as much as full-time employees. Reporting thirty hours a week, was not uncommon. One boy had recently quit a job he liked because his grades had begun to suffer when he was expected to put in six hours some week-nights and more on week-ends.

Another attraction was the companionship of co-workers, who were very often seen as more supportive than fellow students. People on the job were seen to take one at face-value, and not for who one's parents were or where one lived, or what kinds of grades one was getting. Quitting a job would mean the loss of this group of people. The co-workers of one student had passed the hat and given him a computer for his birthday.

Many students had tasted the money, maturity, and power available to them in the labour force, and were attracted to these. Work exposed students to the adult world and allowed comparisons between the roles of student and worker with respect to hours worked, relative value systems, and demands made in each. The role of worker was said to be better by many adolescents. They reported feeling more grown up on the job, were given more responsibility, had developed friendships, which some said was harder for them to do in school, and so on. The work role might be seen by many to be more supportive of a maturing personality than the role of student.

Those who were not fixed on employment realized that money that seemed good now would not be good in the long run. These were often students who were more financially secure and were studying to keep their grades at the university-acceptance level. They reported fewer jobs, and these for different reasons. Many received allowances but still wanted extra money to spend on amusements. They were certain that their jobs were not the kinds they would have eventually--that "working at Wendy's is not the life I'd choose," but sometimes these were fine for now.

But for some students, the world of work was the real world, and as soon as they could finish the requirements for a diploma--or perhaps before, if the right job was offered to them--they would be leaving. They felt they related better to their work companions, enjoyed being at work better than being in school, and were simply putting in time to satisfy demands of teachers and their families that they leave with a piece of paper that confirmed what they already knew--that they were all grown up.

Some said they would leave now and finish later--perhaps work for a semester or a year and then come back. One girl was almost at the end and needed only one or two more credits, which she planned to get in the summer. Sometimes a job begun as a time-filler became permanent, but even if it did, part-time classes toward high school completion were seen as always available.

In sum, financial need was one reason some students left school. Where a job was seen as a privilege, a young person offered a job often felt blessed to accept it. People didn't just drop out of school, they more frequently stepped into an alternative existence which promised them more than they had had or could hope to have in school. Some of them preferred to have adulthood now than wait for it at some unspecified future date.

Main Process Theme: Becoming Marginal (10)

The long and short of being selected out: 10

Being marginalized meant being placed outside the ongoing stream of action in a school. The margin was a place from which little or nothing was expected from an individual. Students could become marginal by school processes or they might choose deliberately to marginalize themselves. There were recognized patterns in the process. Leaving school was seen by some as a legitimate and face-saving response to having become marginal.

Students could arrive at high school already marginalized. Students could become marginal in any of the previous 9 ways, and this might happen either by design or by default, and students could decide to leave because school held no more for them. In order to understand the margin, it is necessary to understand how the mainstream might be seen under ideal circumstances. There was a concept of the mainstream of high school which existed in the minds of teaching staff, even if the facts of this idealized picture were not found to be true in their particular schools.

The picture was of a body of students neatly dressed with pleasant faces, who related well to staff and students, tried their best in class and were enthusiastic in their involvement in school activities. These were well-rounded individuals who might not star in any one area, but whose overall efforts made a contribution to the school. By doing their assignments, participating in class, and signing up for as many extra-curricular activities as their timetables allowed, these people tried to make a success of school life.

In schools where a sizable group of these students actually existed, these students were highly favoured and considered to be the mainstream. In schools where these students did not exist in sufficient numbers, staff were wont to ponder on the deficiencies of their student body. The advent of OSIS, fast-tracking, and the 30-credit diploma were seen in some schools to threaten the loss of these very involved Grade 13 citizens.

Because this was the ideal, some students were already considered marginal when they arrived at high school. There were three main groups of reasons. The first was limited academic ability. Students who had had trouble with school in the past, who had been held back one or more years, or been tested and placed in special education classes, began high school life as marginal. This was evident in the girls' and boys' vocational schools, and also in the basic classes at composite schools. There was a stigma attached to bottom level students, regardless of where they were. Students in separate basic-level schools were ashamed to tell outside friends where they went to school and students in basic programs were known as "crayons" to the other students, and relegated to portables by the administration.

The second group of reasons was family background. Many students in the vocational schools were seen as within the range of normal educational ability but had had family or personal problems. Some were living in foster care, some in group homes and some on their own. Some had been in trouble with the law. Some of them were now mothers themselves, struggling to complete their education while learning how to handle an infant. For many students, especially those who had been moved around a lot, attendance had been a problem all through school. Many who had moved frequently had also missed learning crucial bits of information, a circumstance unchanged if the child moved again before the teacher could offer remediation. As the principal of the girls' school said, "These students have failed and failed and failed. They have met nothing but failure."

A third group of reasons was any singularity in a student--a physical handicap, a difference in colour or religion, recent immigrant status. Each was a potential source of marginalization. Each could make the student seem outside the mainstream. Each could necessitate effort on the part of the student to prove belonging (even when she or he did not feel it) and to establish the right to fair treatment. Sometimes their efforts to learn what was expected and establish themselves could lead them into trouble. Interestingly, high academic achievement could marginalize students, making them appear mere grinds who, although very smart in school work, did not mix well with others and did not fit into school life.

If one did not arrive as a marginal person, becoming marginal entailed knowing the picture of the mainstream, and its particular interpretation in the school, and acting out various themes in opposition. This could happen either by design or by default. Design would imply an intention to take themselves out of the mainstream, alone or with others. These might be students who, for one reason or another, became more involved with what was happening outside of class than in, more attuned to the world beyond the school building than that within it. Sometimes there was a friendship group who were making similar discoveries about themselves. They might be attuned to that "different drummer" Thoreau spoke of, and were doing the minimum they had to while in school and would be leaving when they could.

Where marginalization happened by default, it was not intentional but it was definitive. Again, it could come about as a variation of any of the themes we have been discussing, and it would be seen as an alternative to the mainstream in the school. For example, where the school was very concerned about student behaviour, becoming marginal consisted of an accumulation of rule infractions considered serious, such as skips, swearing, smoking, confronting staff, and a mounting of punishments leading to suspension.

Where there were obvious spaces between chosen and unchosen, those lacking favour would perceive their non-favoured status and become disaffected individually or as a group. An alternative body in one school had challenged the dominant group in a reasonable way, but had remained unfavoured. Students from this group spoke openly about the lack of support they felt from staff and their desire not to run with the in-crowd. It appeared that the school did not offer them what they felt they needed.

Becoming marginal at highly academic schools happened in terms of achievement rather than behaviour. Because these schools emphasized high grades, (the disease of "eighty-itis" as one student put it), anything short of that might be cause for discouragement. Students reported the downward spiral of becoming discouraged, skipping class, becoming less competitive in class, and perceiving that the teacher thought less of them. This was accompanied by a fall in grades and a compensatory but also marginalizing attitude of "don't care." Sometimes students felt they had to leave, and spoke in terms of completing their diploma elsewhere or at a later date, but this did not always happen.

In sum, becoming marginal was a structured experience recognizable to all school inhabitants. It was seen to be an "other" way of behaving when the expected way was clearly defined. Composition of the mainstream and the margins were features of life discussed in one way or another by every staff and student interviewee.

Some schools chose to act on what was known about this process in the interests of retaining students, and some schools acted to hasten the process of marginalization and exclusion.

Conclusions

1. Re Tracking and Sorting:

Retention seems most likely when students and their families have made informed decisons about the student's program, when students are matched to the program in terms of both ability and commitment, when programs are seen as absorbing and useful, and when students may move from one program to another when this is desired.

2. Re Negotiation:

Retention of students seems most likely when behavioural and performance agreements are seen as positive and beneficial by most students, and when teachers and administrators display a reasonable degree of flexibility in all aspects of school life.

3. Re Accreditation:

Retention seems most likely when staff is best-informed of the possibilities for student accreditation, is seen to enable rather than withhold opportunities for accreditation, and liberally encourages, especially in the earlier years of high school, the granting of credits.

4. Re Staff Response:

Retention seems most likely when students are made to feel that their staying or going is of personal concern to at least one staff member, when staff work to ensure a sense of belonging for all students in the building, and when punishments are not intended solely to exclude them.

5. Re Identity:

Retention seems most likely when individuals are treated with the utmost respect, when differences among people are celebrated but also their commonalities, and when the popular signals of one's clothing are seen merely as necessary covering to the capable individuals within.

6. Re Interests:

Retention seems most likely when there is a good offering of activities to students both outside of classes and as part of their for-credit program, where students are encouraged to take part in such activities, where it is staff responsibility to supervise such activities, and where teachers use the opportunity of these sessions to become closer to students than they can in class.

7. Re Non-Attendance:

Retention seems most likely when students are encouraged in a positive way to be in class, when reaction to their absence is immediate and comes from the teacher rather than the office, and when their presence in class is seen to matter to themselves and to others.

8. Re Sexuality:

Retention seems most likely when there is some acceptance of the inevitability of this stage in adolescents' lives, when students of both sexes are encouraged to develop themselves as fully as possible in all directions, and when gender does not become an issue in staff expectations for individuals.

9. Re Labouring:

Retention seems most likely when students see a link between what they are learning in school and what they will need for the work-world, when maturing students are treated with the dignity one accords adults, and where assistance is provided for those in financial need.

10. Re Becoming Marginal:

Retention seems most likely when teachers get to know their students, when students are encouraged to know and help each other, and when those edging out toward the margins are identified early and pulled back into an ongoing mainstream of acceptable possibilities.

Notes

1. For various views of larger issues in the tracking process see George J. Papagiannis, Robert N. Bickel and Richard H. Fuller, "The Social Creation of School Dropouts," *Youth and Society*: 14: 3 (1983), 363-392. Margaret D. LeCompte, "The Cultural Context of Dropping Out," *Education and Urban Society*, 19: 3 (1987), 232-249. Linda McNeil, *Contradictions of Control; School Structure and School Knowledge*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986). Arthur Pearl, "Slim and None--The Poor's Two Chances," in Daniel Schreiber, *Profile of the School Dropout*

(New York: Random House, 1967). James E. Rosenbaum, "The Structure of Opportunity in School," *Social Forces,* 57:1 (1978), 236-256. Randall Collins, "Some Comparative Principles of Educational Stratification," *Harvard Educational Review,* 47:1 (1977), 1-27. Janet Finch, *Education as Social Policy* (London: Longman, 1984).

2. See Michael W. Sedlak, Christopher W. Wheeler, Diana C. Pullin, and Philip A. Cusick, *Selling Students Short; Classroom Bargains and Academic Reform in the American High School,* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986). David Reynolds, "When Pupils and Teachers Refuse a Truce," in Geoff Mungham and Geoff Pearson, *Working Class Youth Culture*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976). Arthur G. Powell, "Being Unspecial in the Shopping Mall High School," *Phi Delta Kappan* 67:4 (1985), 255-261. Stanley William Rothstein, "The Ethics of Coercion; Social Control Practices in an Urban High School," *Urban Education,* 22:1 (1987), 53-72.

3. The current process of gaining high school credits is not yet but should be the focus of new research in Ontario.

4. For various views of high schools see for example Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, *The Good High School* (New York: Basic, 1983). Cliff Schimmels, *I was a High School Drop-in* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1986). John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984).

5. Extensive literature exists on this subject, but read for example, Delbert S. Elliott, Harwin L. Voss and Aubrey Wendling, "Capable Dropouts and the Social Milieu of the High School, *The Journal of Educational Research* 60:4 (1966) 180-186. Margaret D. LeCompte, "Defining the Differences: Cultural Subgroups Within the Educational Mainstream," *The Urban Review,* 17:2 (1985) 111-127. Joseph A. Kotarba and Laura Wells, "Styles of Adolescent Participation in an All-ages Night Club," *Youth and Society,* 18:4 (1987) 398-417. Joyce Levy Epstein, "Friends among Students in Schools: Environmental and Developmental Factors," in Joyce Levy Epstein and Nancy Karweit (Eds.) *Friends in School; Patterns of Selection and Influence in Secondary Schools*. (New York: Academic Press, 1983).

6. Research on student activities is summarized in Alyce Holland and Thomas Andre, "Participation in Extracurricular Activities in Secondary School: What is Known, What Needs to Be Known?" *Review of Educational Research,* 57:4 (1987) 437-466.

7. See "Why Do Students Stay Away from School?" in S. B. Neill, *Keeping Students in School: Problems and Solutions* (Sacramento: American Association of School Administrators, 1979). Anne Jones, "The School's View of Persistent Non-attendance," in L. Hersov and I. Berg *Out of School* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980). For an old view see "Causes of Leaving School," in Leonard P. Ayres, *Laggards in Our Schools* (New York: Survey Associates, 1913).

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10. See Robert L. Sinclair, and Ward J. Ghory, *Reaching Marginal Students; A Primary Concern for School Renewal*. (NSSE, McCutchan, 1987) especially Chapter 3, "Becoming Marginal."

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CHAPTER 5

FROM SCHOOL TO WORK: A PROCESS OF TRANSITION

The transition from school to work represents a critical period in the life of an individual. Regardless of educational credentials, finding suitable employment is a milestone and an achievement most people remember. A complex problem, facets of which have been studied by sociologists, economists, psychologists, educators, and politicians, the transition is an area of study that belongs to no one discipline. Youth unemployment, the role of the secondary school, and the awkwardness of young people as they move from the world of school to the world of work concern researchers from many disciplines, educators, and policymakers from many countries.

The transition through which young people pass is a status change, a time period, and a process. Status changes from being primarily a student at school to being primarily an adult at work or its alternative. The time includes the period between full-time school and full-time work. For some, this is a brief time frame which might, in fact, overlap between school and work; for others, the time between school and an employment is substantial. The transition process begins during the school years and ends some time after an individual becomes established in an occupation; it is a process through which every young person must go, regardless of educational level.

The transition from the school system is affected by many factors: personal aspirations, family background, part-time work, peers and work contacts (Porter, 1982; Ginsberg, 1980; Rutter et al., 1979; Sewell et al., 1976; Maizels, 1970). In spite of these differences, the process can be characterized as three staged: sorting or channelling within the school system, the individual's selection of an occupation, and the employment opportunities that are available in the community (Ryrie, 1983). All are part of one process which links school to work in an individual's life.

Education is considered to be more than a preparation for employment; knowledge has a value which generally enriches life, both that of an individual and that of a society. However, during times when many youth appear to have difficulty finding employment, the relationship of school to work is often re-examined, usually critically. Since the Second World War the school system and the world of work appear to have become "two solitudes", although some bridging has begun (Ontario Teachers Federation, 1983; Canadian Education Association, 1983; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1988). The world-wide recessions of the 1970s and early 1980s particularly affected youth who were preparing to enter the labour market and the subsequent high levels of unemployment created pressures upon governments to react. It also created a situation in which educators were often considered to be part of the problem, not the solution. A crisis response to education obscures the more fundamental process which is a normal part of life for everyone who attends school.

Youth unemployment is traditionally higher than that of the general population (Hall & McFarlane, 1974; Sen, 1981); nevertheless, unemployment rates among youth aged 15-24 during the period 1981-85 ranged from an unacceptable 17.8 to 11.5 per cent, approximately 50 per cent higher than the general rates (Statistics Canada #71-001, 1986). Southern Ontario is, however, currently in a favourable employment situation with 1986 rates in the Toronto Metropolitan area at 9.3 per cent for youth and 5.5 per cent for the general population (Ontario Ministry of Skills Development, 1987). Cyclic unemployment tends to obscure the fact that the employment situation for young people has deteriorated and is likely to remain disjunctive (Coleman & Husen, 1985; Blaug, 1985; King, 1985; Livingstone, 1987).

These marketplace changes, connected with increased technology, solidification of internal labour markets rather than the creation of job entry opportunities, and demographic shifts based upon gender, combine to make the transition process an even more difficult period for adolescents who are also being transformed into adults (Levinson, 1978).

The transition from school to work has, therefore, become an issue upon which attention is increasingly being focused, although responsibility toward students who leave school has been called an "administrative and academic no man's land" (Taylor, 1983). In this study, four research questions were asked:

(1) What themes concerning transition emerge from a search of the literature?

(2) What are the perceptions of school personnel about various aspects of transition?

(3) What do on-site observations in schools reveal regarding transition?

(4) What do the three data bases reveal about the transition process?

Three sources of information were used. First, a comprehensive search of the literature resulted in the selection of sixty studies, twenty each from Canada, the United States, and other English-speaking nations. Second, questionnaires were mailed to school personnel in a sample of six Ontario school boards; 2,250 questionnaires were analysed. Third, one-day site visits were made to five schools during which administrators, counsellors, teachers, and students were interviewed. Research which illuminates aspects of the transition process helps to reveal where there is consensus, where there are gaps of knowledge in the field, and where there are conflicts. Following is a description of the methodology and presentation of the findings, a discussion of the results, and a summary.

Methodology and Presentation of Findings

Most of the data for this chapter are qualitative in nature, although, some statistics were derived from the questionnaire. On occasion, statistical levels of significance were calculated to test for differences of opinions among groups of respondents.

Literature Review

Adapting the techniques used in meta-analysis and integrative reviews of the literature (Cooper, 1982; Rosenthal 1984; Cousins & Leithwood, 1986), the literature was not reviewed in the traditional narrative style, but treated as a research project in itself. The material, drawn from both published and unpublished secondary sources, was analysed as if it were primary data. Sixty studies, selected because the authors have made a sustained contribution to the field by being involved in more than one project concerning aspects of school leaving, job entry, and transition, were reviewed to determine what factors linked education and employment. Priority was given to studies conducted within the past fifteen years about secondary school leavers, but earlier major classics were also included. When a study involving tertiary leavers was relevant, it also was included because some aspects of the transition process are assumed to be similar for all levels of school. Not all of the studies were focused upon transition, therefore, the emphasis within a particular study varied. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were given equal weight because insights generated from both types of thinking were equally important and data that otherwise might have been unavailable were thereby included. The sixty studies comprised twenty each from Canada, the United States, and other English-speaking countries or organizations (England, Scotland, Australia and New Zealand, OECD, UNESCO).

Except for two American commissions which were directly relevant, government reports were excluded. The result was a comprehensive, but not an exhaustive, review of the literature.

The emergent themes were classified according to three links between education and employment: individual and personal, social background, and interrelationships between education and employment. They were also categorized with regard to the author's particular focus on the three stages of transition: school-related, the interim period, and employment. Nineteen themes are listed in Table 5.1. (For a listing of the results and a discussion by author, see Appendix D.)

Individual and personal characteristics may be modified or influenced by schooling, but the effect is indirect, not direct, for most students. That is, educators or the school system may be "shaping" influences or institutions, but gender and personal characteristics are not very malleable. Educators, however, may be influenced by the retrospective opinions of students who have become adults in their community.

Social background is known to affect students, particularly in the earlier years of schooling. Performance in school is often indirectly influenced by the degree to which the social background of the student is consonant with the school culture. Once school is completed, the social background re-emerges as an important influence upon employment because of the contacts and opportunities that family and friends provide.

The interrelationships between education and employment are very complex, but it is in this area that educators have considerable and direct influence. The assessments of teachers affect students throughout their entire school careers and follow them into employment situations. Credentials create opportunities that otherwise would not exist and an increased knowledge of job markets and career paths help many students, especially those who are economically disadvantaged. There is a difference in emphasis between North America and other English-speaking countries about mechanisms and programs which would facilitate transition from school into a career, but all generally recommend a more formal bridging between the two areas of life. Educators can help to develop presentation and communication skills. Part-time work is a controversial area -- it claims valuable time, but if other linkage or co-operative programs are not available, it may be the only way by which a student can gain work experience. Job-entry levels may be a function of the marketplace, but co-op programs and other community-based education help to close the gap between school and work.

Questionnaire Data

Questionnaires were distributed by mail to school personnel having six different roles: principal, vice-principal, department head, assistant department head, guidance counsellor, and teacher. Respondents were asked for their perceptions of the transition process (Appendix D). Responses to the five items on the questionnaire are listed below; when the responses for groups differed significantly at a 0.05 level, this is noted though the specific statistics are not reported for the sake of brevity.

Table 5.1

Links between Education and Employment by Themes Emerging from the Literature Review

(The Three Stages of Transition: School-related, Interim Period, Employment)

Individual and Personal

1. Student self-esteem and "school weariness" affect transition. **(School-related)**
2. Students with low retention levels need assistance with transition. **(School -related)**
3. The transition is a time of personal growth and decision-making. **(Interim Period)**
4. The transition is a disjunctive period for many. **(Interim Period)**
5. Gender and personal characteristics are major influences when in transition. **(Employment)**
6. Job satisfaction affects retrospective opinions of the transition and of school. **(Employment)**

Social Background

1. Family/friends affect educational performance, attained education. **(School-related)**
2. Schools reproduce social divisions which influence the transition. **(School-related)**
3. Those who have good linkages find the transition easier. **(Interim Period)**
4. Family and friends provide contacts during the transition period. **(Interim Period)**
5. (Un)employment levels, including part-time work, are an increasing concern. **(Employment)**

Interrelationship of Education and Employment

1. More attention to aspects of employment in school would influence the transition. **(School-related)**
2. School credentials are used as a screening device by employers during transition. **(School-related)**
3. Secondary schools should focus more upon transition links with the community. **(School-related)**
4. Presentation and communication skills influence employers and make transition easier. **(School-related)**
5. Job entry level is an important aspect of a successful transition. **(Interim Period)**
6. Part-time work may be an important component of transition. **(Interim Period)**
7. Education is a decreasing economic investment, therefore, the transition is more difficult. **(Employment)**
8. Educational channelling affects employment opportunities during the transition. **(Employment)**

School personnel were asked whether they thought the central administration of their board and their school had made a commitment to assisting students who are making the transition from school (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2
Perceived Commitment to Transition by Central Administration
n = 2173

		Board					
Rating	**Mean**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
No interest	4.4%	18.9%	4.4 %	7.2%	2.6%	4.4%	6.5%
Little interest	26.2	43.2	29.4	29.9	22.5	27.1	22.6
Some priority	58.4	35.1	51.8	52.6	62.6	61.4	59.3
Maj. priority	11.0	2.7	14.3	10.3	12.3	7.1	11.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Principals and vice-principals differed significantly from all other respondents with regard to their understanding of their school board's commitment; they thought the board was more committed than did the others. Among the other groups, teachers perceived a greater commitment at the board level than did department heads. Except for one board, in a rural location, all felt that there was a board commitment for some student groups, but that otherwise there was little interest. Very few considered this issue to be a priority at the board level.

At the board level, teachers and vice-principals differed significantly from department heads in that they perceived a greater commitment by the board.

Table 5.3
Perceived Commitment to Transition at School Level
n = 2188

		Board					
Rating	**Mean**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
No interest	1.6%	2.6%	1.1%	1.0%	2.9%	0.5%	2.0%
Little interest	19.1	20.5	17.8	29.9	19.7	22.7	11.9
Some priority	60.8	66.7	58.6	66.0	60.1	60.7	65.7
Maj. priority	18.5	10.3	22.4	20.6	17.4	16.1	20.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

All agreed that school level commitment was a priority for some students. In three boards, one located in a vocational-industrial area, one in a rural area, and one in a northern location, school personnel felt that their school had, as a major priority, helping students in transition. In three other boards, located in a community with one secondary school, in an urban area, and in a suburban area, school personnel felt their school had very little interest in assisting students in transition.

School personnel were also asked how they ranked important aspects of schooling that students might use when obtaining employment (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4a
Perceived Importance of Credentials to Transition
n = 2066

Rating	Mean	Board 1	2	3	4	5	6
Low	6.3%	11.1%	7.6%	3.3%	7.6%	5.0%	3.6%
Smwhat low	18.8	22.2	21.5	19.6	13.6	20.6	22.8
Smwhat high	37.5	41.7	40.2	44.6	38.1	35.8	29.5
High	37.4	25.0	30.7	32.6	40.7	38.6	44.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.4b
Perceived Importance of Work-Related Skills to Transition
n = 2092

Rating	Mean	Board 1	2	3	4	5	6
Low	3.7%	2.9%	3.6%	2.2%	4.2%	3.9%	2.6%
Smwhat low	16.4	22.9	13.7	19.6	19.7	14.5	16.4
Smwhat high	41.3	45.7	41.0	39.1	44.7	38.6	39.5
High	38.6	28.6	41.8	39.1	31.6	43.0	41.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.4c
Perceived Importance of References to Transition
n = 2075

Rating	Mean	Board 1	2	3	4	5	6
Low	4.4%	5.5%	3.8%	4.5%	5.6%	3.9%	3.6%
Smwhat low	21.5	13.9	24.5	23.6	18.8	23.6	17.1
Smwhat high	47.1	50.0	45.0	40.4	45.3	49.4	53.4
High	26.9	30.6	26.7	31.5	30.3	23.1	25.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.4d
Perceived Importance of Personal Contacts to Transition
n = 2061

Rating	Mean	Board 1	2	3	4	5	6
Low	5.5%	0.0%	4.8%	4.4%	6.6%	5.3%	5.8%
Smwhat low	19.3	11.4	23.3	15.4	17.8	19.8	15.7
Smwhat high	39.9	42.9	39.4	37.4	37.7	43.3	38.7
High	35.3	45.7	32.6	42.9	37.9	31.6	39.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5.4e
Perceived Importance of Other Important Elements in Transition
(Presentation, Attitude, Part-time Work, etc.)
n = 266 (Open-ended responses)

Rating	Mean	Board 1	2	3	4	5	6
Low	8.3%	50.0%	6.6%	22.2%	8.0%	4.2%	14.3%
Smwhat low	13.2	25.0	13.1	16.6	19.0	8.5	4.8
Smwhat high	33.1	0.0	41.0	22.2	34.0	29.6	28.6
High	45.5	25.0	39.3	55.6	39.0	57.7	52.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

With regard to differences in responses by role, principals and department heads differed significantly from assistant department heads and teachers by placing more emphasis upon the value of credentials when obtaining employment; there were not significant differences among groups on the other items except that teachers differed significantly from vice-principals in that they placed more importance on other influences, such as presentation, attitude, and part-time work.

Perceptions of the percentage of students who work full- or part-time during the school year were not significantly different among any of the school personnel.

Table 5.5
Perceived Percentage of Students Who Work During the School Year
n =2137

		Board					
Rating	**Mean**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Less than 50%	21.1%	10.3%	21.3%	23.3%	25.8%	11.7%	36.1%
Approx 50%	36.8	56.4	35.4	42.2	35.3	37.2	38.1
60 to 80%	34.9	20.5	37.1	31.1	30.6	42.6	22.7
Over 80%	7.2	12.8	6.2	3.3	8.3	8.4	3.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Except for the board located in an industrial area, where most of the respondents felt that 60-80 per cent of their students were working during the school year, school personnel felt that about 50 per cent, or perhaps more, were working while attending school full-time.

Fewer responses to the general open-ended question were received. There were no significant differences among the respondents and the percentage of respondents did not vary greatly among the boards (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6
Comments to Open-Ended Question About the Transition Process
n =2254

		Board					
Rating	**Mean**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Comment	13.4%	9.8%	14.0%	12.0%	15.6%	11.5%	13.9%

Responses to this question (a total of 305) were classified into six categories: comments about co-op or work-related programs (119), comments about part-time work (51), comments about the transition process (43), comments about the school system (34), comments about streaming (31), and comments about student attitudes (27).

A summary of these responses is provided in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7

A Summary of Comments about the Transition Process

Re: Co-operative education and other employment-oriented programs including work experience, linkage, apprenticeship, and career days. (Total = 119 responses)

Only 2 negative comments, based upon interference with school, were received. Most were as follows:

*co-op plays a major role
*co-op is a priority
*I laud our work experience and co-op program
*more co-op, less part-time work
*extend to all students including at risk and academic
*specific career days not enough
*include more time management, career goals, work relevance, life skills, presentation and social skills in curriculum
*encourage increased business contact with school esp. references
*encourage more general interaction with business.

Re: Part-time work. (Total = 51 responses)

Only 3 positive comments, based upon extent it might complement career goals. Most were as follows:

*very common even when post-secondary is a priority
*affects extra-curricular activities especially sports
*homework doesn't get done
*contributes to fatigue when in school
*a lure
*detracts and conflicts with educational goals
*legally restrict part-time work
*if transition is too delayed, part-time work results.

Table 5.7 (Continued)

A Summary of Comments About the Transition Process

Re: The transition as a process. (Total = 43)

*socio-economic status affects timing
*society is blamed for all poor transitions, an abrogation of individual resp.
*a trying process
*we should be more involved
*should be a strongly supported ideal in all settings
*make as smooth as possible
*OSIS makes transition more difficult
*works well for this school
*implement a course on transition
*school is too long a period before transition
*more computers would help with transition.

Re: The school system. (Total = 34)

*more mentorship is needed, by either teachers or guidance
*smaller classes would help
*long-term objectives and more focus needed in education
*clarify goals of education
*more creative, critical thinking is needed
*more ownership by teachers is needed
*dubious connection between curriculum and jobs
*not the role of public education
*teachers don't know marketplace.

Re: Streaming. (Total = 31)

*early leavers are not helped ; others are helped a little
*general and basic need help
*more guidance for vocationally oriented students
*most go to post-secondary so transition not an issue
*transition to college is improving
*assistance to post-secondary is good
*eliminate streaming.

Re: Student Attitudes. (Total = 27)

* positive skills need to be taught
*students disappear and don't use facilities of school for help
*workplace is a shock because it is less accommodating than school
*students need initial assistance - so do employers
*most students realize the importance of school
*if students are refugees with English-speaking problems, process is more difficult
*make the curriculum more student focused.

If the responses to co-op and work-related programs and the transition process are combined, they constitute more than half of the total (162 of 305). Generally, the respondents were very positive about the effectiveness of co-op education in facilitating the transition and felt that a greater commitment should be made. Part-time work, however, is generally perceived as being a negative influence because of the effect it has upon school performance, both in attainment and in concentration, as well as in a decreased ability to participate in extra-curricular activities. There was a perceived need for more individual attention to students and a clarification of the goals and objectives of secondary schooling. Also, while some schools had populations of students who moved directly into postsecondary education, there was general agreement that early school leavers and students in the basic or general levels needed more help in transition.

Finally, responses from three of the five site schools that had been visited, each representing a progression toward urbanization, were analysed (Table 5.8).

Table 5.8

A Comparative Analysis of Three Site Schools with Regard to Perceptions of Transition

Item	Rural school (Bd 1A)	Mid-Industrial School (Bd 2B)	Suburban School (Bd 5B)
Board Commitment			
Some priority	35.1%	58.8%	31.0%
School Commitment			
Some priority	66.7	58.8	64.0
Importance of Credentials			
Somewhat high	41.7	28.6	31.9
Importance of Work-related Skills			
Somewhat high	45.7	40.0	31.3
Importance of References			
Somewhat high	50.0	26.7	38.3
Importance of Personal Contacts			
Somewhat high	42.9	33.3	18.8
Importance of Other Aspects			
Somewhat high	-	-	25.0
Percentage Who Work Part-time			
60-80%	20.5	33.3	64.6
Approx. 50%	56.4	46.7	20.8

The vocational school, located in the board reflecting the most industry, showed exactly the same commitment toward helping students through the transition as the board. In the rural and surburban boards, there was a greater commitment at school level than at the board. With regard to aspects of education that link education to employment, credentials were perceived to be less important than work-related skills, references, or personal contacts except for the surburban school. At that school personal contact was ranked lowest; it was also the only school where comments about other important aspects such as presentation, attitude, and part-time work were received. Perhaps the higher percentage of students who worked part-time, also noted at that board, accounts for differences in perceptions. At the other two schools, part-time work was believed to be approximately 50 per cent.

On-site Visits

During the one-day visits to five schools (in two other site schools, the majority of students went directly to postsecondary education, so they were excluded from this aspect of the study), a cross-section of people in the school were interviewed including administrators, guidance counsellors, teachers, attendance secretaries, and students. In addition, informal conversations with parents, bus drivers, other students or former students, cafeteria staff, parents, and visitors took place. The purpose of the visits was to determine local variances in the transition process. Students and school have distinctive "cultures"; these affect how they perceive transition. A brief profile of the schools follows; it includes a description of the school environment, a discussion of what appears to happen when students leave these schools, and a brief profile of an individual who personifies a characteristic of that school. (Codes and names have been substituted to preserve confidentiality.) One school (1A) is the only school in a mostly rural district. Two schools (2A and 2B) are single-sex vocationally based schools in an industrial setting. Two schools (5A and 5B) are composite suburban secondary schools in a locale that is increasingly multicultural.

In 1A, school is the place where things happen. While students may not be excited about the curriculum, the lunch room, hallways, and gym at noon hour are busy places but the school is quickly emptied after hours because most of the students are bussed in from isolated communities. The social life of the students appears to be one in which they consume alcohol (while forbidden during school dances, this is a weekend priority), hunt (in the fall, during season, there are many trade-offs between teachers and students with regard to attendance and assignments), and explore their sexuality. Many students work part-time because they are bored on Saturdays (or Friday nights) if they don't work, and the extra money assists in attaining the pleasures of life. Fewer jobs are available during the week. While there is a co-op program in the school, it is primarily for business and special education students; the local college's Futures program is also small and nascent.

During the 1987 school year, 18 students were "retired" and 16 graduated with SSHGDs. Of the 18 retirees (9 males and 9 females), no responses were obtained for 8 when telephoned, 2 numbers had been discontinued; 1 was known to be working at a food store; 7 parents reported that 2 of the former students had moved to a more urban area, 3 were working at low-level service jobs, 2 were unemployed - 1 of these, disabled, appeared at the school during our visit. By contrast, of the 16 honours graduates (11 males and 5 females) 14 were enrolled at postsecondary institutions elsewhere in Ontario, 1 was employed in construction and the whereabouts of 1 was not known.

In addition to these two groups of former students, whose life scripts appear to reflect considerable divergence in less than one year after leaving the same school, there were 103 SSGD graduates (56 males and 47 females). Of these students, 33 had returned to school as Grade 13 students or co-op students and were still there, another 3 had transferred, and 2 had returned to school but dropped out. Of the remaining 65 students, 28 were known to be at college, 17 were known to be employed, 1 was in the Futures program, the whereabouts of 19 was not certain although some had applied to college. Of these nineteen, three parents reported that one hoped to attend college in a game warden course this fall although other sources reported that he apparently had recently been in trouble with the law; another girl was "doing fine" as a sales clerk, but the mother felt that the development of practical skills such as operating computerized cash registers in school would have been valuable. The third mother said her son, Nick, at 11:30 a.m., "was still in bed". He had been looking for employment without success: one other son had obtained employment as a carpenter's helper via Futures but their small community was so isolated, that not much work was available. She said that the young people prefer to live in their home town because wages in the city were too low to allow them to support themselves.

Thus, it seems that for students who remain in the community, regardless of whether they retired or graduated, employment was primarily in low-level service jobs. Co-op education and the college Futures programs provided some linkage with business and industry, but not much was being done to capitalize upon the major economic base of this district: recreation and tourism. Since guidance consisted of three part-time teachers who were occupied with scheduling, it seems likely that many students are not being sufficiently challenged to establish appropriate career goals and subsequently become a "lost generation", having obtained employment at the lower rather than higher levels of opportunity or not at all.

The boys' and girls' vocational schools, schools 2A and 2B, are extremely neat, quiet, and orderly, and are located on well-maintained streets where the exteriors of the brick houses differ little from each other. Neither school has extensively used outdoor recreational or physical activity areas, but both have defined smoking areas. The girls' school has bilingual signs posted on doors (l'office), potted plants, and three rooms, beautifully equipped, for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. On the floor and outside of the building, the boys' school has a large mosaic with the tree of knowledge, the lamp of learning, and trade symbols such as a plumb line, square angle ruler, and cogwheels. Curriculum is less important than socialization in these schools. While students are encouraged to achieve to the best of their academic ability, the "real" values are punctuality, appearance, and deportment because these are the qualities that help these students to succeed "out there". Both groups of students were neatly dressed; actually they looked better dressed than many of the regularly streamed students elsewhere --both schools have a written dress code. Since the students had not selected the school, but had been selected for it, they felt stigmatized. Some opinions were strong: a unanimous no from the football players (who played on a nearby composite school's team) when asked if they would choose to come to this school -- they acknowledged that they got jobs because of the school's good reputation among employers, but they missed girls and liked having an audience at games, plus they volunteered a derogatory nickname for the school that was a variation of the school's name.

By way of contrast, for many of the girls, school provided the most stable environment in their lives; approximately 25 per cent were receiving social assistance. Since the semester had begun six weeks earlier, four had left because of employment opportunities (mostly part-time) and five others had acquired "home responsibilities" (new babies) -- since there is no category in the computer for this area of life, these girls (women?) are listed as "employed". One grad, the top athlete of last year, was interviewed. She is verbal, attractive, and confused about what to do next; she had returned to join in the physical education class. She says she was referred to this school because of her reading and writing skills and "because she was lazy". She had just returned from a trip to Venezuela with her parents. She was working in a sporting goods store which had been her co-op placement, but she would like to be a physical education teacher although she knew she "didn't have the education". She wore the school jacket she had been awarded at graduation.

Although she is one of the outstanding graduates of the school, her future is less certain than is that of another former student who had received a Certificate of Training and gone on to employment in a sheltered workshop.

Both schools have small co-op programs of approximately 20 students each, and both have work experience programs which last about 10 days. A small percentage of students work part-time after school or on weekends, the boys more so than the girls. The money for the boys is "to maintain a lifestyle"; for the girls, it is more likely to be used for basic needs. In both schools the administration does most of the counselling, which is often connected with school discipline. The boys' school will acquire a full-time guidance counsellor next year while the girls' has a part-time nurse and the co-op teacher has one period of counselling.

Of last-year's graduates for the boy's school (37 received SSGDs and 22 received Certificates of Education), 2 were at a college, 3 were apprenticing, 6 had transferred to composite schools, 1 had moved from the province, 1 was in the military, and 1 was in a Futures program; the others were working at various jobs: bricklaying, carpentry, printing, and retail or wholesale small businesses; only 7 graduates' whereabouts were not known. If differences existed between the job entry levels of these two groups, these differences were not immediately apparent except that none of the Certificate boys had gone to anything but work. Seniors who were about to graduate seemed confident that they would obtain employment because of contacts obtained from family or friends; several expected to follow in their father's footsteps. Of the 36 graduates from the girls' school (2 of whom had a Certificate of Training), 5 were adults who had returned to obtain a high school diploma, 6 had returned to the school for "upgrading", 1 was doing correspondence at home, 2 were known to be working full-time and 2 had part-time jobs, 2 were in a sheltered workshop, 1 was at home on a disability pension, 1 had moved because of a "difficult home life", and the whereabouts of the other 16 were unknown. Although more of the girls begin with part-time work, apparently more of the girls also obtain positions which are appropriate for their specialities, such as food service, day care and merchandizing -- these students do have more up-to-date equipment in their schools such as industry standard cash registers, than do the boys whose shops contain much more expensive equipment which is becoming or is outdated.

The problem for and with vocational students is that they have a "stigma" and what no one has apparently resolved is whether the stigma is reduced or enhanced by this type of streaming. On the one hand, vocational schools provide a safe, clean environment which the girls, in particular, need and from which the boys benefit. On the other hand, it is an artificial separation from what they have faced and will face in the community. How to provide both protection and integration for these students is a difficult challenge for educators. Given that these are vocational schools, it is, perhaps surprising that more attention is directed toward the issue of stigma than toward the need for a supportive transition to work.

Somewhat closer to Metro Toronto than either of any of these three schools are two composite suburban schools that reflect recent shifts in immigration and the affluence of southwestern Ontario. The area is industrial and industrious, a haven for the upwardly mobile. While there is not much glamour, there is money -- these are the youth to whom the consumer society directs its seductive messages and these are the youth who have few other models to live by. There is little rebellion. The two schools represent the extreme ranges of "middle" class. Prep youth, at school 5A, have designer jeans, loose sweaters, trendy but not mod haircuts and, for the leaders, white cardigans with the school colours striped on the sleeves. At school 5B, things are not quite so obvious. Clothes are tighter here, skin tight, and black is a favourite colour. Hats and jackets are more colourfully individualized -- but they aren't allowed during school time.
Both schools begin the day with *O Canada* and both have world maps in the hallway that

acknowledge the multicultural origins of their populations. At 5A school, the most visible minority group is East Indians "with money" while at 5B, it is Black students from the Caribbean. Asian students are most obviously located in the library. At 5A, student elections provided a focus for the entire school assembly; at 5B, students were rehearsing a musical.

In both schools, there were small co-op programs which will enrol 50 students each by next term. At 5A, although the placements are sophisticated (in stations such as the hospital, a biology lab, a radio station, and retail management), some parents have resisted having their offspring enter the program because they have postsecondary ambitions for them. At 5B, the pupil:teacher ratio is lower so that needed social support can be provided. Placements include a wide range of possiblities (sales, fashion, accounting offices) and, sometimes, students find their own work stations.

Guidance facilities at both schools were among the most developed of any that can be observed in Ontario school systems but the demands upon the counsellors were quite different. At school 5A, there was an extensive library on university and college options, plus the computer program, Choices. There were also support groups for students who were experiencing bereavement or divorce. Withdrawal forms are completed on students who leave during the school year; this provides data on returned books, anticipated future plans, type of parental contact, and attained credits. At 5B, there was a greater demand for one-on-one student support to discuss issues such as how to survive after students' parents had "kicked them out" or how to handle conflict with a teacher. While both schools provide role models, the counsellors at school 5A act more as a resource, and those at school 5B provide more personal advice.

Alice, almost sixteen, a student from a mixed white and black racial background, cannot decide whether to return to school next fall to take co-op which might help her obtain her desired goal of becoming a data entry operator. She is going to look for employment this summer in a firm which might permit her to advance with this type of school support. If she can obtain such a position without returning to school, she says she will work full-time and earn her last three credits by correspondence. This year she has enrolled in a mixture of subjects that include Grade 10 level math, two English courses (of which she is presently failing one), typing, law, and family life. She has a steady boy-friend but has temporarily moved in with a girl-friend because she didn't get along with her married sister. Her mother is in Florida and her father is in Jamaica. In the fall, she plans to share a $900 per month apartment with two other girls. She now earns $400 per month from her part-time job as a cashier at a food store so expects that she can make it, although it will be tight. Alice is attractive and meets people easily. Already she doesn't have time to go to school every day, but says she makes a point of not missing classes that are important. Alice doesn't see why science ("I know I'm not going to use it.") and geography ("I don't care where in the world they are *from*.") are compulsory courses because they have little to do with her life goals, although she recognizes that the knowledge might be of general interest. Attitude is the most important thing in employment -- also a readiness to "start at the bottom and a willingness to learn without expecting too much." Her relationship with the guidance counsellor is keeping her in school; her relationship with an English teacher is driving her out. We talked on a Tuesday; she had four detentions to serve that week for being late -- previously her record had been three. "Sure I'm going to finish. Look how far I've come, " she says, but there are powerful social forces which are pulling her away.

In both schools, part-time work is a major component of the students' lives. At 5A an estimated 70 to 75 per cent work and at 5B the estimate is 90 per cent. These students work between 17 and 30 hours per week. The weekly disposable income is believed to be $75-$100; this estimate was consistently stated by students, administrators, teachers, and guidance counsellors.

For most 5A students, this is money to be spent on clothes, cars, music and video or other entertainment. More 5B students apparently use the money to support themselves. Regardless of social status or reason for working, teachers state that many students have difficulty doing assignments so little homework is assigned, especially in the general level; in addition, students are too tired to participate fully in class. It goes without saying that extra-curricular activities suffer.

Nevertheless, of the 100 Grade 13 graduates for school 5A in 1987, 25 were Ontario Scholars and all, except 1 went directly to postsecondary education. Surprisingly, school 5B, with a higher dropout rate and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, had 160 Grade 13 graduates of whom 33 were Ontario Scholars. The principal estimated that about 50 per cent went on to postsecondary institutions, but suggested that not many would graduate. School 5A had 187 Grade 12 graduates of whom 79 had honours; approximately half returned for Grade 13 or to upgrade their marks so that they could obtain entry into university or college. School 5B had 116 Grade 12 graduates of whom 16 had honours, some of whom returned for an extra half-year. In both schools, increasing numbers of students are returning for an extra semester, thus making their high school experience one of 4 and 1/2 years, They then go to work in February of the last year, perhaps anticipating a fall enrollment in a postsecondary institution.

In both schools, the secondary school emphasis upon postsecondary education is the obvious goal and students are encouraged to obtain the high school diploma. Co-op programs influence a minority of students while part-time work is a major consumer of students' time. For those students who do not plan to continue to university and college, there is support, but it is much more limited and narrow in focus than that given to those planning on tertiary education; students planning on university and college increasingly are finding that they lack sufficient academic attainment to obtain entry in the university or college of their choice where standards are rising.

In summary, although the differences in school culture among these five schools obviously vary considerably, some characteristics are shared with regard to transition. All of the schools know generally where their graduates have gone, but more complete records are kept of those students who go to postsecondary education. Students who leave during the year are not tracked. Co-op programs and, to a lesser extent, work experience programs assist a minority of students. Part-time work is a major component of many students' lives and this affects their commitment to education, sometimes positively, but mostly negatively. Students appear to understand the importance of credentials; they may be less knowledgeable about the importance of learning.

Results

Results from the three data bases provide answers to the research questions, but the emphasis varies among them.

(1) What themes concerning transition emerge from a search of the literature?

These themes have been summarized in Table 5.1 and a detailed discussion containing specific references is in Appendix D. The three-staged transition process (based upon school-related, interim period, and employment entry levels) can be grouped into individual and personal factors, social background factors, and interrelationships between education and employment. When this is done, then the persistance through time of important themes becomes obvious.

An individual who enters the transition process during the later years of schooling is also becoming an adult, literally growing up. Although others of the same age are also going through these changes, it is a time for making personal decisions about the future and there are powerful influences which affect those decisions. Gender, race, and other personal characteristics play an important role in how these decisions are made. Family and friends provide a support group which may facilitate the development of a career or their absence may make the transition more disjunctive. School personnel, school performance, and school attainment have critical roles because these assessments influence self, employer, and community perceptions. When linkages between education and employment are strong, the transition process is easier. In North America, part-time work and work-experience programs such as co-op education are very important components of the transition process for students who leave high school, whether or not they graduate. Structural unemployment, linked to the availability of jobs in the economy, is less of a problem in industrialized Ontario than in other parts of Canada, most parts of Britain, Ireland, Australia , and New Zealand. However, the employment level at which most young people enter full-time work is declining; this raises the issue of the relevance of education as an economic investment. Employers emphasize the importance of presentation and communication skills, but use credentials to screen applicants. More attention in school to aspects of employment would influence the transition process, at the individual and personal level; it could also help to mediate social background influences, and assist young people to find employment in a rapidly changing labour market. Not many have thought about how the expertise of educators and employers might be linked so that the career paths of young (and current employees) might be maximized.

(2) What are the perceptions of school personnel about various aspects of the transition?

The focus of school personnel is, as might be expected, upon the programs that appear to provide linkages between the worlds of school and work (see Tables 5.2 to 5.8 for details.). There is the perception that schools are doing more than boards with regard to a commitment toward transition, but the difference is not substantial. (The mean for questionnaire respondents regarding board commitment is 58.4 per cent and for school commitment is 60.8 per cent; however, the mean for "little interest" at board level is 26.3 per cent and 19.1 per cent at the school level. Respondents ranked references (47.1%), personal contacts (39.9%), and work-related skills (41.3%) higher than credentials (37.5%) as important aspects of schooling that students use when obtaining employment. Part-time work was perceived as being very important with estimates of 50 per cent to 80 per cent of the students working during the school year, although these estimates varied considerably between schools and boards. In their comments, respondents praised co-op education and other work-related school programs that assisted the transition process, but recognized that more could be done, especially for low-performing students. A need for more individual relationships between students and staff, concern about the clarification of goals of secondary schooling, and development of a more realistic and positive attitude among students was also expressed.

(3) What do on-site observations in schools reveal regarding transition?

Regardless of commonalities, the individuality of a school, based upon the community in which it is situated and the people who staff or attend it, is reinforced by on-site visits. A rural school is distinctive in that the majority of students are bussed in from more isolated areas; therefore, the school day is shortened and everyone knows everyone well. Vocational schools are distinguished by their cleanliness, orderliness, and sex-segregated activities. The composite schools located near Metro are reflections of recent multicultural immigrations and affluent local economies.

Three site schools, one rural, one vocational-industrial, one suburban composite provide an interesting spectrum of individual variations from the board and school means that were established from the questionnaire data. The general mean for board commitment was 58.4 per cent and for school commitment at a board level was 60.8 per cent. Whereas the vocational-industrial school reflected an identical commitment toward transition from both the school and board (58.8%), the rural and the surburban schools both reflected a higher than the general average commitment (more than 60%) from the school but lower than general average from the board (approximately 30%). (See Tables 5.2, 5.3, and 5.8 for specific percentages.) Staff at the rural school also placed a higher than average emphasis upon credentials, references, and personal contacts as linkages between education and employment; however, those at the vocational-industrial and surburban schools ranked credentials, work-related skills, references, and personal contacts lower than the average. (See Tables 5.4 a, b, c, d, e and 5.8 for specific percentages.) With regard to part-time work, the percentage of surburban school students working part-time was estimated to be much higher than the average and was also much higher than the rural and vocational-industrial schools. (See Tables 5.5 and 5.8 for specific percentages.)

Thus it would seem that school plays a much greater role in the lives of students who are geographically more isolated, but their opportunities for employment, both part-time and postgraduation, are more limited unless they leave their community. The closer one comes to Metro Toronto, the more part-time work becomes a component of students' lives and the less influential personal contacts become with regard to linkages between education and employment. The influence of school-based credentials, work-related skills, and references also declines. From a discussion with individual students, it also appears that more of these young people are on their own and are making decisions that reflect this independence.

(4) What do the three data bases reveal about the transition process?

The concept of a three-staged transition process, which is linked by persisting individual and personal factors, social background factors, and the interrelationship between education and employment, provides a theoretical framework for a discussion of information from the more specific data bases generated from school personnel and on-site visits.

Responses to the questionnaire indicated school personnel recognize that students with low retention levels require extra assistance and that the transition process is a disjunctive period for many. Social background factors, such as part-time work and families who provide support also are seen to be influential in bridging the gap between school and work. School-based programs, such as co-op education, are perceived to be effective but they affect only a small portion of students, although Ontario has been a leader in this area. School personnel place relatively more importance upon personal contact and references and less upon credentials than the literature suggests.

Site visits reveal that while all schools have distinctive institutional qualities, each also uniquely reflects the community within which it is located. Conversations with students, dropouts, and graduates reinforce how important personal self-esteem is and how much these students believe themselves to be making independent decisions. Gender and personal characteristics play as important a role, as the literature suggests, but the students may not be aware of their impact. Students who have made a relatively successful transition view their schooling positively, but many cling to the familiar and comfortable environment of school. Family and friends provide important contacts with regard to employment, especially for rural and vocational students. Co-op assists a minority of students, but the programs are very small relative to the school population; many more students are introduced into the realities of the marketplace via part-time employment. There are many more opportunities for work in urban areas, but these can interfere with school performance and they are usually low-level service jobs.

For former students living in rural areas, for young mothers, and for some graduates, it is doubtful whether a diploma makes much difference in entry level employment; marketable skills such as familiarity with computerized cash registers, good presentation, and communication skills are probably of more immediate value. For those continuing to postsecondary levels of education, there is increasing competition to obtain entry level marks, and career-oriented decisions are made without much knowledge of the marketplace. Because of recent innovations such as co-op ed, linkages, and other work-related innovations, Ontario may, however, be more advantaged than most other English-speaking locales throughout the world.

Summary and Conclusions

An increased understanding of the transition process through which all young people go as they leave school is obtained when the results from three sets of data bases are analysed. The transition process may be classified as having three stages: school-related factors, an interim period, and the employment situation. In addition to this process, the transition should also be defined as a phase when adolescents become adults and as a time period between two hierarchical systems, school and work. The end of school is normally a disjunctive phase of life, but changes in the labour force have exacerbated the problems many young people have when moving from school to work, even though southern Ontario currently enjoys a positive economic climate.

A review of the literature, based upon 60 sources, twenty each from Canada, the United States, and other English-speaking areas, produced 19 themes: six are related to individual and personal characteristics, five are related to social background, and eight are based upon the relationships between education and employment. These themes persist throughout the three stages of the transition period. The most important themes appear to be the influence of gender and personal characteristics, the influence of part-time work upon students, the success of co-op, and other work-related school-based programs with some students, the influence of family and friends at the time of leaving school, the effect of school evaluations upon student's lives, and the need for more communication between educators and employers with regard to credentials, work-related skills, and performance.

An analysis of responses of 2,250 questionnaires completed by a cross-section of personnel in six Ontario boards revealed that respondents generally consider school level commitment to transition to be greater than board level commitment. They place a greater emphasis upon references and personal contact than they do upon credentials with regard to the links between education and employment. Concern is expressed about the influence of part-time employment upon school performance, attainment, and extra-curricular activities. Co-op education and other work-related programs are praised for how they bridge gaps between school and work, but there is recognition that much more could be done, especially for students in the lower levels. Greater clarity with regard to school goals and objectives and more individualized mentoring is needed.

On-site visits to a rural school, two sex-segregated vocational schools, and two composite suburban secondary schools, reinforced the idea that the transition is a time when individuals make decisions that have a major impact upon the rest of their lives. Often these decisions are made without much formal consultation with prospective employers or knowledge of marketplace conditions. Little tracking of former students is done although most schools have informal knowledge of graduates who are doing well. Those who have good connections, whether at school or at home, find the transition period easier. Part-time work is a very important component of many students' lives; this experience may or may not facilitate career development and usually depreciates school performance, but provides social prestige. For those who continue with postsecondary education, there is increasing competition and a deferment of some aspects of the transition process. While the value of secondary education may be decreasing as a direct economic investment, there is no doubt that as an ideal it remains a value which most people seek to realize. Life is a continuous process and education provides a bridge which crosses many rough passages. Passage from the education system, itself, should be a transition to the best possible life that one can envisage.

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CHAPTER 6

RETAINING STUDENTS: THE TASK AHEAD

Why the Concern?

"Dropouts, like the poor, will always be with us." This sentiment, expressed sometimes in different words but always with the same meaning, was expressed repeatedly by school staff interviewed for this study. They were well aware that, in historic terms, schools retain as many or more of their students than they ever have. "Why be concerned? Many youth don't need or don't want what we have to offer. They should get jobs!"

Often, sitting in the teachers' lounge or staff lunchroom, we found ourselves defending the very subject of the study. Not only were dropouts not perceived to be a problem, but "weeding out" difficult students to protect the education of others was viewed as a positive act. "School is a privilege, not a right."

Considering that Ontario, at the present time, has one of the healthiest economies in the world, it was hard not to sympathize with the teachers. A principal button-holed one group of students and asked them their wages at jobs they had held in the past year; the figures reported ranged from $4.75 to $15.00 per hour, the last in a summertime construction job. A local food warehouse paid $11.00 per hour on the nightshift, implying an annual rate of pay of $22,900 that would equal the salary of a beginning teacher in the school board. Who could say a student with a poor academic record is being irrational to quit school to take such a job?

The answer, of course, is that not all students obtain work paying a good salary and that many jobs won't last beyond the next economic slump. A more accurate -- and more forbidding -- picture is provided in *The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America*, which details the economic impact on youth of recent changes in the economic and employment structure of Western economies. Table 6.1 is reproduced from this report. It indicates that the annual income, in constant 1985 dollars, for all males aged 20 to 24, declined by 26 per cent between 1973 and 1986; for male dropouts the decline was 42 per cent and for Black males 61 per cent. As the report explains,

> [S]table, good-paying jobs which do not require advanced training are rapidly disappearing. Between 1979 and 1985, the United States suffered a net loss of 1.7 million manufacturing jobs. A fast-changing economy has produced millions of new jobs in the service and retail sectors, but with wages at only half the level of a typical manufacturing job. Fields such as transportation, communications, utilities, government and agriculture once offered steady employment to millions of [youth].... A highly competitive technological economy can offer prosperity to those with advanced skills, while the trend for those with less education is to scramble for unsteady, part-time, low-paying jobs (p. 1).

Counting Dropouts

Evidence collected for this study suggests that *increasing* numbers of students are dropping out of Ontario high schools. Unlike other recent studies, we focused on *annual* dropout rates from schools, rather than longitudinal cohort rates. Annual rates are a more useful rate since they provide

Table 6.1

Trends in the Real Mean Annual Earnings of 20-24 Year-Old Civilian Males, 1973 to 1986, by Educational Attainment* and Race/Ethnic Group

(in 1985 dollars)

	All Males (20-24)		% Change in Earnings 1973-1986			
	1973	1986	All	White	Black	Hispanic
				(Non-Hispanic)		
All Males	$11,939	$ 8,859	-25.8	-20.1	-46.1	-29.1
Dropouts	11,595	6,725	-42.1	-42.4	-60.6	-27.3
High School Graduates	14,937	10,720	-28.3	-24.4	-43.8	-34.5
Some College	12,864	10,756	-16.4	-11.4	-42.7	-21.2
College Graduates	14,357	13,502	- 6.0	- 5.6	+ 6.5	N.A.

* **Note**: Earnings data pertain only to those 20-24 year-old males who did not cite school as their major activity at the time of the March 1974 and March 1987 surveys.

Source: Table 1 in *The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America*, An Interim Report on the School-to-Work Transition. Washington, D.C.: Youth and America's Future: The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship, 1988, p. 21.

immediate information that can be used in monitoring a school's effectiveness in retaining students. Longitudinal rates can be calculated only after all students from a given Grade 9 cohort have graduated: waiting until 1993 to learn how effective we were in 1988 is not terribly useful.

Site studies in seven schools revealed that their annual dropout rates had increased from an average of 10.6 per cent in 1983-84 to 15.3 per cent in 1986-87. In all likelihood, the current economic boom is pulling students out of school and into jobs; in some cases, in the early 1980s these students may have preferred to leave earlier but the lack of jobs associated with the "Great Recession" of 1981-82 may have kept them in school longer. In any case, schools have not, in most cases, responded to the competition. Not only are students voting with their feet, they told us frankly that at work they were not only valued for their presence, but were respected equals of adults many years older.

The situation was not, of course, the same at all schools. In one the dropout rate had decreased from about 6 per cent to 2 per cent; in another it increased from about 2 per cent to 8 per cent; in yet another it had increased from 8 per cent to 24 per cent -- in just three years! Two others experienced rates that varied considerably year to year, but averaged about 25 per cent. In the seventh school the rate was relatively constant at roughly 8 per cent. Why the disparate rates? Why was one school able to buck the trend toward increasing rates?

School Culture, Student Culture and Dropping Out

In a word, the answer is culture -- school culture, Ontario's culture, and Canadian culture. Of each school we asked the questions, "What kind of person does this school value most? What is its idea of the 'ideal' student? What becomes of the student who differs from this ideal?" As well, in an analysis of questionnaire data concerned with the extent to which each school could be described according to characteristics that have been identified with "effective schools", we sought to assess the importance of school culture in explaining school dropout rates. Key school culture items included not just questions about the value placed on different kinds of skills (income-producing, social, athletic/talent, and academic), but also the incidence of theft, the professionalism of teachers, and the sense of shared "ownership" of the school among staff and students.

What we found through both types of analysis is that schools value a certain type of student to the exclusion, almost, of others. This student is characterized by good academic and social skills, a positive and cooperative disposition, and a sensible commitment to sports, music, or student government: a well rounded person, a person who was a pleasure to be with and on whose behalf one was willing to put out extra effort. The ideal student was not a "grind", not a "genius", not an extroverted entrepreneur, not a social innovator, not a technical whiz kid. Indeed, any one of these latter types would have been marginal in all of these schools: marginal because they were disruptive or marginal because they were a threat to the balanced order that served the mainstream student.

Creating a productive environment for the mainstream student is the job of the entire school system, not just the individual school. At the board level, actions are taken to divide students among differing types of schools. Though not always labeled as such today, these schools are the collegiates, the comprehensive secondary schools, and the vocational schools. Large school boards, by grouping the most valued students together in one school and offering them solid academic and rich co-curricular activities, while grouping the lesser valued students together in vocational or technical schools, create school-culture settings that then facilitate the playing out of different scripts for the student. Smaller school boards, or those that because of geography must place heterogeneous students together in one school, create comprehensive schools in which the full range of students must be accommodated. In these schools, the problem is to deliver a high level of service to the favoured students while minimizing the cost of and disruption created by the less-favoured. The main mechanism for creating these different cultural settings is the streaming of students into advanced, general, or basic level courses of study.

At one level, all this may be obvious. At another level, it includes certain surprises. First, the mainstream ideal we spoke of seems to pertain to all types of schools and races of students. In vocational schools offering basic level courses, teachers spoke with pride about "academic" students who were leaders in shops or student council; in two "regular" high schools, student leaders with whom we spoke were Moslem students of East Indian or Middle Eastern descent; all Black students who were selected by school staff for us to speak with were Canadian or British born and, on occasion, might practice their "Caribbean accent" to fit in with the majority of the Black students in the school. Second, even in the most academic schools, the emphasis on exceptional academic achievement or even the intrinsic joy of knowledge and discovery were not transcendent. Of more than 50 students interviewed, only one or two indicated that learning was fun. The ideal we speak of, then, transcends questions of race, ethnicity, or even intrinsic intellectual ability, and speaks to the notion of a broadly held view of what people would like *their* children to be like, even though they might recognize that a society full of such individuals would be impracticable if not impossible.

As a practical matter, this valuing of one type of student, or holding in high regard one script for youth above all other scripts, explains how we arrange our institutions of learning and where we place our money. For example, technical skills, even of the most esoteric sort, are not held in high regard -- and Canada does not have an M.I.T. or a Cal-Tech. (The University of Toronto considers itself the *Harvard* of the North). Technical programs in high schools are in decline; courses in drafting will attract students only if offered at the advanced level. And sometimes not even then. Resources such as student counselling are affected by the priority placed on the mainstream students. The operational definition of counselling in comprehensive schools is academic guidance: choosing the courses necessary to get into the college or university program of choice. Usually, counselling is not career, employment, or personal counselling. A student in most schools wanting practical assistance on leaving school to go to work would best talk to the business or technical teacher. In one school we visited, a student's counsellor was not informed of a student's dropping out until after the vice-prinicipal had signed the withdrawal form.

The linkages between school culture and dropping out are quite direct. Whether students are streamed among schools (i.e., in collegiates, secondary, and vocational schools) or within schools (comprehensive schools with advanced, general, and basic streams), the separation creates groups that develop, to a marked degree, their own subcultures. Norms differ for each group, norms as to teacher expectations, teaching styles, rigour of curriculum, student behaviour, homework, and the like. These norms are reinforced by the rewards and punishments meted out by the school. Rewards take various forms - academic awards, high marks, time off to attend various school sponsored events, and freedom from rules. Punishments generally are some form of exclusion: from class, from school events, from free time to socialize (e.g., detentions), or from school (e.g., suspensions).

In practice, we found that the behavioural expectations for students became more restrictive as one moved down the status hierarchy. Schools offering advanced-level programs almost exclusively were quite permissive of student behaviour; comprehensive schools less so; and basic vocational schools the least of all. Students at advanced-level schools daily committed deeds that would have seen them suspended in the comprehensive or basic level schools, including such sins as eating in the halls, littering, smoking on campus, being in the halls during class time, being tardy, etc. As well, many advanced-level students spent less time in class than their general or basic counterparts (although they also spent more time on homework). Their absences were excused -- school trips abroad, sports meets, field trips, etc. Absences for students taking general- and, especially, basic-level courses were invariably unexcused since there were far fewer opportunities for them to participate in events which carried the "excused" designation. The discrimination is subtle, but evident. Norms for students in the advanced level are academic: the bargain is that they do good academic work with good effort displayed and the rewards will be given. Norms for students in the general and basic levels are behavioural: conduct yourselves in an obedient manner and you will not be hassled. Academic effort, especially outside of regular class time, is not expected or demanded.

A "culture of cutting", a phenomenon identified by Hess (1987a, b), is one feature of general- and basic-level subcultures. Cutting school to be with friends, to go shopping, to be free of the school's denial of adult status is a norm reinforced by some schools' punishment structures, well represented by some schools' policy of suspending students with attendance problems. The message of such a policy is that class attendance is not important but that obedience to the rules is. The number of cuts, detentions, and the like a student accumulates becomes a status symbol within a subculture where students with academic inclinations are ridiculed by others. In communities where the school is the centre of adolescent life, the school's attraction to students is sufficiently strong to contain the "culture of cutting" and limit its effects. But in urban areas, with their surplus of malls, video arcades, and jobs, the attractiveness of being out of school exceeds the attractiveness of being in school. Suspensions are transformed into rewards -- more time at the mall with friends.

Reinforcing the general- and basic-level subcultures antipathy toward academics is the accepted view that general and basic credits are not "worth" as much as advanced credits in that they lead no place. It was common knowledge among many students that the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology require advanced-level credits in a number of subject areas for admission to many technical programs. One result of this policy, noted particuarly in one school, was a polarization of students. Increasing numbers were enrolling in advanced-level courses, leaving too few students for a full array of general-level courses to be offered. Even typing, drafting, and drama were offered at the advanced level, the last exclusively so. Those students still enrolled in general-level courses were becoming increasingly isolated and, it appeared, were dropping out in increasing numbers even while a larger percentage of the student body as a whole was planning to undertake postsecondary education. These students seemed to recognize that the die had been cast, that the development of their life-scripts did not include further full-time education -- that transition to work sooner rather than later made sense.

Changing School Culture

If school culture, together with student culture, in large part account for the predilection of students to drop out, is it possible to change these cultures? If so, what changes should be made? Who decides on these changes? How does one go about making the changes?

In our analysis of the effects of different modes of school management, school culture was treated as a given, a precursor of other events. For the analysis at the individual level, this is appropriate. A new student, teacher, or administrator joins an existing school with an existing culture. The culture acts upon them more than they act upon the culture. For example, when a teacher with 14 years of seniority "apologizes" for still teaching general stream courses and feels pressed to explain she took eight years off to raise a family, the dominant values of the school culture are coming through. When a Grade 9 student with 80's in his general stream courses admits he cuts once in a while and feels pressed to explain that he does so to show his loyalty to his friends, who already consider him to be too much of a "brown nose", the student subculture is emerging, not his personal values.

Yet, cultures do change, sometimes internally due to social innovations by their members and leaders and sometimes due to external forces. The response of one school to external policy initiatives by the provincial government was evident in the physical structure itself. Like a stratigraphy reflecting geological ages, the building had three layers: the original academic core, the technical wing built in the 1960s when the province exploited federal funds for expanding technical education, and the cluster of portables serving students in the basic level who arrived in the wake of Bill 82 mandating special education in the early 1980s. Socially, the school remained an aggregate as well, with the mainstream culture carried by the academic core and the technical and basic programs occupying marginal positions. That is to say, the school's culture had changed, but not by much.

A similar situation pertained in two schools, one vocational and one comprehensive, that had recently arranged for day care programs within the schools so that adult students could be more easily accommodated. These adult and day care programs, though indicating the schools had responded to the threat of declining enrolments, were add-ons that did not greatly affect the core school cultures.

One factor that enhances the stability of school cultures is the significant role played by teachers who carry the values that the school seeks to realize. The teachers are the most stable element in most schools; this has been particulary true in the past decade when teacher turnover has been low. In schools visited, the average tenure of teachers exceeded ten years, and teachers with two decades of service in the same school were not unusual. In contrast, students spend four, five, or six years in a school and principals often less. Secure in the jobs and values, teachers often can let the world change around them.

But a lack of responsiveness to change at the individual teacher level may be exceedingly dysfunctional at the institutional level. One site school, noted for its strong academic program and "pass 'em or shoot 'em" philosophy of education, earned the fear of potential students. With declining enrolment in the school board, open enrolment policies, semestered schools available nearby, more flexible academic policies elsewhere, and the extension of the Catholic high school system, the school's very existence was threatened. Enrolments were dropping to a level at which the breadth of the academic program offered was being curtailed. A new principal, with community support, turned the situation around, instituting a mixed-mode scheduling system, more flexible academic policies (higher marks and the granting of permission to take courses at night or summer school), and an expanded counselling unit. This school was the only one of the seven site schools in which the dropout rate had declined over the past three years. In spite of the obvious "success" of change in this school, many teachers resented the changes even though they recognized that the new policies had been necessary to ensure the survival of the school. Some, one gathered, would have preferred an honourable end to the school rather than being forced to compromise their values.

Shifts, if not revolutions, in school culture are possible, then, although the sources of change more often appear to lie outside rather than inside the school. Schools are especially permeable institutions and, in today's competitive climate, they are unlikely to resist for long changes in behaviour of their clientele, though preferred responses are the addition of programs (e.g., special education, ESL, adult courses with day care services, alternative schools for at-risk youth, etc.) rather than the modification of core values. Only when the clientele possesses substantial political power, as in the case of schools serving university-bound youth, does it seem the fundamental problem will be faced.

School administrators, as suggested, can bring about some change in school culture, first by imposing changed behaviour and, in the long term, selecting staff that conform with a new culture. Yet, the statistical evidence drawn from our cross-sectional survey is not promising as to the effect of administrative responses. Though "effective administrators", as defined in the effective schools literature, were associated with more effective policies and better school community relations, overall they seemed to have little or no influence on dropout rates. Indeed, in one analysis, strong administration was associated with *higher* dropout rates. While it may be that the best administrators were placed in "problem" schools, it is also possible that autonomous, strong principals who focused on the maintenance of order were more prevalent in comprehensive and vocational school, where firm control of student behaviour was valued by staff and administration alike, while flexible, responsive principals were located in schools serving students enrolled in advanced-level courses and their families. Part of the problem may be that the effective schools literature is dominated by American writers concerned about the social disarray in inner cities where heroes such as bull-horn carrying Joe Clark impose order out of chaos (Bowen, 1988; Clark, Lotto & Astuto, 1984). As far as we could discern, the establishment of order is not an endemic problem in Ontario's high schools. We must face the question, "Beyond order, what?"

Based on past experience, reform most likely will be grounded outside the school, in the community, the school board, or the government of Ontario. In this case, the primary tasks become articulating the demand for change, holding schools accountable for their performance in retaining students, and ensuring that academic policies do not reinforce the creation of student subcultures that lead students who are not in the mainstream to reject the only institution likely to improve their life chances.

Implications for Administration

If schools are to change, administrators must change. That is, "business as usual", if it ever was a prescription for success in the past, certainly is not a prescription for success in the future. A school principal good at maintaining a school in a stable environment who maintains the same behaviour in a changing environment is headed for disaster. Although it rings of "social Darwinism", organizations, like species, that do not adapt to ecological changes are bound for extinction.

The key to adaptation is an openness toward messages, often taking the form of initiatives for change, arising in the environment or context external to the school, an ability and willingness to assess and evaluate this information, and a predilection toward innovation, modest risk-taking, and a more pluralistic set of values. To some extent, this suggests an increasing political role for principals, a role in which they are not simply supporting the *status quo* but reallocating resources in a manner that supports emerging demands. This is necessary, we believe, in order to make schools more attractive and productive environments to students who do not fit the mainstream ideals that, we have argued, lay behind the current allocation of resources and efforts within Ontario high schools.

The messages or initiatives we speak of come from a number of sources. Certainly, schools and their principals are sensitive already to provincial dictates and school board policies; but signals are also being sent by the students and parents, signals that are not being received, in some cases, or not being accepted, in others. One such signal, of course, is the annual dropout rate. As we have suggested, this information, though present in raw form in official documents such as the September Report completed for the Ministry of Education, was in no case analysed extensively in the schools we visited or treated as evidence of negative choices being made by students.

The effective schools literature indicated a portrait of the "effective principal" which was not confirmed in the present study. This disconfirmation, evident in both the quantitative and qualitative data, corresponds with the analysis made by Bossert (1988):

> Effective schools studies have tried to resurrect the bureaucratic ideal by stating that strong principal leadership is needed in order to structure schools for effectiveness. But this prescription is weak because little is said about what processes must be structured or what structures need to be imposed in order to create success (p. 351).

In the path analysis used to test a formal model to explain school dropout rates, we found that administrative behaviour was not directly associated with a school's dropout rate. Only through administrative effects on community relations was administrative behaviour associated with lower rates of early school leaving. Although linked strongly to school goals, strong administrative behaviour was associated with effective school policies and organization but these, in turn, did not lead to lower dropout rates. Bossert continues,

> The multilevel perspective (Barr & Dreeben, 1983) seems to chart the future for research on school organization effects by overcoming the biases of the bureaucratic model and the loosely coupled formulation. It focusses attention on how the organizational milieu shapes the nature of instructional activities in which teachers and students engage and the way in which resources are made available to and used by teachers and students in these instructional activities. When the processes that constitute the technical core of the school are described, linkages between organizational structure, administration, and student learning will become apparent (p. 351).

While Bossert speaks of learning outcomes, we have seen that a parallel situation holds for school retention. The structure of school programs, the allocation of counselling and teaching resources to favour one stream over all others, and the like, are strongly related to the development of norms that lead to leaving school early. At the school board level, decisions to stream among (as opposed to within) schools have similar effects. This interpretation suggests that for schools to adapt to their changing environment, it is likely that their internal organization and structures will require change.

Policies and Retention

Policies and practices affecting student retention are defined and applied at multiple levels: provincial, school board, school, department, class, group and individual. Most of this study has been concerned with what occurs at the school level. It is at the school that changes in a community are first felt and where, it is to be hoped, responses first occur. Many issues at the school level have links to board-wide and provincial concerns, of course, but in most cases a school can act independently to respond without waiting for action at higher levels. Some questions, though, such as a policy of streaming *among* schools, are board-wide and others, at least in Ontario, are province-wide, such as the policies requiring that courses be offered at three levels of difficulty or that 30 credits be earned for high school graduation.

School Level Policies

Nine questions or issues were identified at the school level that relate, in our view, to school retention. These are scheduling and course accessibility, attendance monitoring, school order, punishment, streaming, transition to work, course planning and academic press, multiculturalism, and links to the community. Collectively, these matters structure or organize many aspects of the education that students receive, the schooling they experience, and the types of groups they form. In some cases we are prescriptive, but in most cases we raise issues, suggest possiblities, and consider contrasting viewpoints.

Course Scheduling and Availability. School schedules are now, generally, a far cry from the "lockstep, rigid" schedules so rousingly condemned by educational reformers of the 1960s. Semestering, traditional, rotating, tumbling, flexible schedules exist in various schools; no two of the seven site schools visited had the same type of schedule. But the question arises in many of these schools as to who benefits and who loses by the practices adopted? Traditional schedules were defended in one comprehensive school as being necessary for the advanced stream to participate fully in school activities without missing too many classes, while in a mixed-mode scheduled school (with some courses traditional and some semestered) it was argued that the slower pace of the traditional schedule favoured the less able students. Regardless of who benefitted individually, it was also noted that competiton with other schools meant, in some cases, that semestered courses had to be available at the Grade 12 and OAC level if students were not be be lost to other schools.

In addition to when and how courses were scheduled in a given school was the question of other opportunities to take courses in night or summer school. In some boards, these options do not exist; in others, they were readily available and open to all students, adult or adolescent; in yet others, school or board regulations restricted the access of adolescents to night school.

As far as we could determine, those schools (and school boards) that sought, as far as was possible, to accommodate the different learning styles, abilities, and preferences of their students offered the most positive settings. Giving students multiple choices, multiple opportunities, conveyed a supportive, helping perspective that was lacking in hostility; rigid restrictions and a lack of choice suggested the opposite.

In addition to when classes are scheduled is the question of how many courses a student is enrolled in at a given time. The 30-credit requirement for high school graduation creates an uneven distribution of courses across the high school years. Most schools will schedule students into eight credits each in the first two years and seven each in the last two, for a total of 30. Students completing OACs for university admission seemed to be completing their work in four and one-half or five years, often carrying only three or four credits in the last year. This pattern, then, created two paradoxes. First, the first-year students, undergoing a difficult transition from elementary school, had the heaviest schedules while OAC students finishing school had the lightest. Second, those students planning to continue on to university ended their high school careers with a light load that little prepared them for the rigorous loads of university.

On the positive side, the blurring of the line as to when a person is "on schedule" removes much of the stigma that occurs when a student falls a half-year or year behind his or her peers. This very sort of softening of the lines that marks the end of secondary schooling was recommended by Bachman (1971) two decades ago. On the negative side, students in Grades 9 and 10 are being forced to phase down from advanced- to general-level courses for all or part of their programs because of the heavy loads they are required to carry. The course loading pattern creates a "shakedown" period that deprives some youth of continuing courses most relevant to technical programs at college or university. This phenomenon was particularly evident in schools where there was only one shot at completing a course (i.e., no opportunities for night or summer schools) and where students had heavy work commitments outside of school.

Attendance Monitoring. Attendance does matter and thorough, efficient, effective attendance monitoring is probably one of the most viable methods of keeping students in school, both on a daily basis and until graduation. The correlation between student dropout rate and absenteeism we found confirmed what other researchers have reported and the field research demonstrated a number of approaches to attendance monitoring that appear promising.

The schools that seemed most effective in keeping students in school place the first responsibility for student attendance on the teacher, not school administrators or clerical staff. As well, they had devised methods of attendance recording that relieved teachers of the clerical burden so that they could focus their time and energy on the the personal side. They provided teachers ready access to home and work numbers of parents and prepared profile sheets showing when students were absent (e.g., course and time slot in schedule) so that patterns of behaviour were evident.

Absences are not all alike, of course. A student may be absent due to school field trips, parental request, illness, a death in the family, religious holidays, cutting class, cutting school, and so forth. Variable record-keeping methods among schools make comparisons difficult and speak to a need for standardization. Any type of absence, though, means a student is not in class to participate and learn from activities there. Our perception that students in advanced-level courses were as likely to be absent as those in general or basic levels, but that their absences were more likely to be "excused", suggested and implicit double standard as to the importance of class time. Thus, a coding system for different types of absences ought not to preclude attention to the question of how much time all students spend in class and the implicit reward system in the practice of excusing certain students from class for school sponsored events which, in fact if not in theory, are not available to students in other levels.

School Order. That the maintenance of order was a significant concern of administrators and teachers is not surprising to those familiar with high schools. Indeed, the emphasis on the maintenance of order is a theme of much of the literature on effective schools, effective principals, and the like (e.g., Pitner, 1988). There is an entire line of research concerned with pupil control

(Packard, 1988). What was surprising, however, was that in two advanced-level schools, control was at best a minor issue and that as one moved from advanced, to comprehensive, to basic level schools the emphasis on control and monitoring of student behaviour increased. One explanation for this relationship is that more control was needed in the latter schools because of the disruptive nature of some students. Another explanation, though, is that behavioural, as opposed to academic, objectives were applied students in general- and basic-level courses because the former were viewed as more relevant to their future employment. As one principal explained, "Students can't wear shorts here because they won't be able to wear them at work."

Greater emphasis on control in these schools paralleled more emphasis on sanctions and discipline. In contrast, at one of the advanced schools, the principals noted, "We don't have to discipline students for breaking rules since there virtually are no rules to break."

Our question, then, is whether maintenance of order and enforcement of behavioural rules is a means to an end (the provision of a secure, orderly environment for learning) or an end in itself (students should behave in a prescribed manner because that is the manner prescribed). If it is the former, it certainly is justifiable; if it is the latter, then we would question the vast resources that are currently devoted to the act of monitoring trivial behaviour patterns in one setting, a high school, that are permitted without restriction the moment the student leaves the school grounds. Far better to spend the time and effort working individually with students or enforcing meaningful sanctions for important behavioural matters (e.g., attendance).

Punishments. As with attendance, we confirmed that the rate of suspensions in a school was strongly correlated with the dropout rate. While correlation does not, of course, imply cause, case study data suggested that there is a causal connection between outside-of-school suspension, especially, and dropping out. Being suspended was identified as an event occurring late in the process of marginalization for some students; it represents a temporary break from school which, in the case of out-of-school suspensions, means lost class time, a need to make up work and exams, and the like. As well, it may reinforce membership in a marginal group of students that already includes students who have dropped out.

Suspensions are based on the assumption that they remove something of value from the student (the privilege of attending school, association with friends) and brings concern from the home. It is not altogether clear that any of these apply in the case of older students in urban settings, where the dropout problem is concentrated. More defensible are in-school suspensions, which provide supervision, a chance to study, and deprive the student of freedom of association; even lunch-time detentions may be a more effective sanction than a day-long suspension since lunch time is the primary social hour of the day for students. Perhaps the most inventive punishment we noted was the "early sign-in", a 30-minute early morning detention. Though set primarily as a punishment for habitual tardiness to school, it had the advantage of not interfering with after-school work and activities.

In sum, the punishments used to enforce school expectation for schools must be carefully conceived to remove something of value from the student while, at the same time, reinforcing the academic aims of the school. Suspending students for being absent, for one, does not meet this criteria.

Streaming. One can argue that offering students the choice of advanced, general, and basic level courses is a realistic, honest, and feasible policy; it is a policy that received strong support from most of those interviewed and from most questionnaire respondents. Yet, the day-to-day operation of various schools differs so much that a student, depending on his or her place of residence, may have very different opportunities available. In schools serving primarily students working at the advanced level, it is accepted (although sometimes resented) that parent and peer pressure mean a student will struggle with advanced courses rather than phase down to general-level courses, whereas in comprehensive schools, with a more mixed clientele and perhaps less motivated parents and students, there is a concerted effort to "place students where they belong". Given the relatively perfunctory group counselling at the elementary level and an absence of individual interviews with most incoming high school students, it is likely that those students misclassified into too low a level at entry lack the resources needed to move to a higher level or to select appropriate courses at a higher level. Selecting the level and kinds of courses a student takes, particularly at the Grade 9 level, is a key decision that affects the individual's life chances. In many cases, this process seems to occur without sufficient understanding on the part of many students and their parents of its importance and of the options available.

The different levels of courses were not intended to be three separate streams by the authors of the doctrine. Students are supposed to take mixed programs, we were told, depending on the level of interest and ability. The advanced and general streams were meant to be different in kind, not just in rigour. Yet, the student and parent consumers have decided differently; community colleges and universities have confirmed the view: advanced credits are the only meaningful academic currency.

Their verdict, though, does not prove that general and basic programs are not effective at preparing those not continuing to postsecondary education. Unfortunately, the evidence in our study suggests that, as presently implemented, the existence of the three streams does reinforce distinct student subcultures that, in the case of the two lower streams, do not support academic values: homework usually is not given, a cumulative curriculum may not be followed, and cutting school is expected.

The policy of offering courses at three levels is a provincial policy; we will discuss fundamental policy issues regarding this matter later. At the school level, though, some practices reinforce the social separation of students in different streams. Among these are 1) the practice of tying home rooms to streamed courses; e.g., if a student is in general-level English period 2, and home room follows period 2 and is with the same teacher, then the student will be in a "general level" home room; 2) the unnecessary offering of courses at the advanced level, a phenomenon brought about by the stigma many students in the advanced level perceived in taking a general-level course; 3) a lack of attention to the participation of students from all levels of program in the full variety of student life. These are but three of a large number of structural and other practices that could be changed to reduce student separation even while retaining the streaming system. The key point is to be sensitive to the issue, to note how a given policy interacts with the question of student separation and subcultures, and to take appropriate action. To begin, schools might create stable home rooms for students that function as advisories through their high school careers; that is, a place where students, regardless of academic program, come into contact with one another and are exposed to a variety of career and personal planning information.

Course Planning, Coordination, and Academic Press. Part of the school culture concerns the working relationships among teachers and how these relationships affect the quality of the program offered. The literature on effective schools, our survey analysis, and site studies confirmed the importance of these relationships: where teachers in a school work in concert, higher quality programs result. Just why this is the case is less clear, but evidence suggests that joint planning reflects greater professionalization, the assumption of higher levels of responsibility, and a greater stock of knowledge of how to teach all students more effectively.

Rarely, though, did we see planning reach outside the school, to take account, especially in the case of students in general-level courses, of what students would do after they left school.

Though we know of schools and school boards that have developed course packages that link secondary school course content to specific college programs or other training/apprenticeship opportunities, these were exceedingly rare in the schools and the boards studied. It would seem that this type of integration would contribute to the perceived value and meaning of high school courses at the general level.

One result of the current lack of clear purpose in the general stream is a lack of "academic press" at this level. An understanding has been reached between students and teachers on what demands can be place on students taking general-level courses; that level of demand is rarely comparable, it appears, to what the students are capable of accomplishing. Without a clear external justification for higher standards and without apparent opportunities that are tied to these standards, achieving a higher level of academic press without losing students seems unlikely without increasing dropout rates. On the other hand, provision of such opportunities would facilitate higher standards and, perhaps, lower dropout rates.

Transition to Work. Ontario high schools probably do less to prepare students for direct entry to work than they have at any time in the past three decades. School people in urban areas often talk of a "golden period" in the mid-1960s, before the creation of community colleges, when extensive vocational, technical, and business education programs offered courses that provided marketable skills or that were tied to apprenticeship programs (Lawton & Donaldson, 1987). The creation of the colleges terminated that mandate and, since then, secondary schools have not been able to develop a clear philosophy and set of programs that fill the gap, particularly for those who do not plan to go to college. Changes in technology, in student and parent tastes, and in graduation requirements have led to the decline of what remained of most technical programs; only business and marketing courses seem to have avoided the trend. The only hope, voiced by many, is rapid expansion of co-operative education programs, which generally have excellent reputations.

The problem, though, is far more than one of teaching job-specific skills. The bias of the high schools in favour of the advanced stream means that few resources are committed to those bound for the workplace. Exit interviews for students leaving without a diploma are the exception rather than a rule. Links to employers and employment agencies tend to be weak, much weaker than comparable ties to postsecondary institutions. More often then not, the world of work is seen as the competition that interferes with a student's education rather than experiential settings that can be educational.

There are possibilities, within the school, to offer the types of experiences that students desire. Student-run businesses, construction of cottages, and the like, as part of community-oriented packages may be able to provide the opportunity to earn and learn. It was with some irony we noted that students and staff in vocational schools ate far better than those at comprehensive schools and collegiate institutes because of their food-services training programs. Were these same programs operated by the same students in the other schools, their fine work might go a long way toward dispelling myths about the capabilities of vocational students.

Conversely, some schools in the survey reported taking education out of the school. One comprehensive program operated part of its marketing program in a store-front mall location. Changing the ecological setting often corresponds with facilitating changes in student behaviour. Dressing-up to go to "school" in a mall is far more natural than adopting the same dress at the school. And, of course, co-operative education is an extension of the idea that school and schooling need not take place within the walls of the school. Provision of diverse opportunities may help schools to compete with the competition -- without selling out.

Multiculturalism. That Canada, and especially urban Ontario, is becoming increasingly multicultural was evident in the "rainbow" of colours in the halls of several site schools. Youth from some backgrounds lead their schools academically and previous studies on dropouts have noted immigrant children tend to drop out at a lower rate than native-born students. However, some immigrant groups appear over-represented in general-level classes, suggesting this may not always be the case. It appears possible that some immigrant groups may develop dropout patterns akin to those reported for minorities such as the Native Peoples in Canada or Blacks and Hispanics in the United States. The absence of records with ethnic information and countries of origin makes such a possibility difficult to verify in Ontario.

While students and staff uniformly reported negligible tension among racial and ethnic groups, a considerable degree of ambiguity exists as to the degree of acceptance provided and perceived among students from, especially, non-white or non-Christian backgrounds. On the one hand, most schools want to discourage endorsing separation on the basis of ethnicity (e.g., teachers "mixing-up" the seating pattern students choose; "apologizing" for the obvious self-segregation of students in the cafeteria); on the other hand, they want to respect differences (e.g., authorizing a "mosaic" club; sending staff and students on a retreat focusing on multicultural issues).

In our view, more should be done to welcome diversity in the schools, especially in the case of adolescents coming to Canada from the Far East, the Caribbean, and South America. We can expect immigration to increase from these areas in the coming decades and providing clubs, food, and recreation that are identifiably Chinese, Jamaican, Hispanic, or whatever should create an environment which lessens the culture-shock for these individuals. Again, previous research suggests youth who immigrate in their adolescent years have a particularly difficult time adjusting. We should send clear message that they are accepted on their own terms.

Links to the Community. Again, both the site study and survey analysis confirmed the importance of strong links between the community and the school in ensuring an effective school. The fact that principals in four of the seven schools visited had, within the past three years, launched school newsletters that are sent to parents and, sometimes, businesses and alumni reflect a growing recognition of the vital nature of these links. Reaching out to ethnic communities, government agencies, and labour unions, is part of this process.

While we focused on the role of the principal in building community linkages, teachers play an equal or greater role by inviting guests from the community, supporting community events, planning co-operative education, and the like. It is necessary to buffer the school from direct interference with the school's day-to-day management, but a strategic plan that harnesses the energy and expertise of the community can provide benefits to both parties.

School Board Policies

Six key issues were identified that are of primary concern to school boards: the organization of the school board; the training, selection, and evaluation of teachers and administrators; the school board's support for openness in schools to their communities; the school board's support for orderly but not over-controlled school environments; the need for review of the form and practice of school codes of conduct; and the need for improved records systems.

Organization of School Board. A fundamental decision affecting the educational experience of all students in a school board is that of whether or not there will be streaming *among* schools; that is, whether some schools will serve primarily students taking advanced-level courses, while others serve students taking primarily general- or basic-level courses, or whether some other form of organization is used. The arguments for and against streaming among schools are not black and white. Such streaming facilitates the development of school and student cultures in general- and basic-level schools that are not academically oriented and are associated with higher rates of absenteeism and dropping out. Schools serving only students in advanced-level courses are able, it appears, to free themselves of the excessive emphasis on student control issues that often dominate the management of high school, thereby assisting these students to assume greater responsibility and for staff to concentrate on academic and extra-curricular matters. The common alternative to streaming among schools is the operation of comprehensive high schools, institutions that have increasingly come into question because of the need for them to be all things to all people.

We did not look at alternative models; some school boards, we know, are "reinventing" their high schools, creating schools such as "academies", science and technical schools that serve students of all ability ranges, schools for the arts, and so forth. By creating a theme that draws like-minded students together, although not necessarily students of like academic ability or social background, such innovations may provide a structure for school boards that alleviates the negative effects of current streaming among schools while preserving the ability of schools to develop a social consensus that helps to keep youth in school.

The history of a school board -- i.e., what type of organization it has now -- will condition its ability to consider this question. Growing school boards have an opportunity to innovate without having to change current structures. These boards can provide leadership in experimenting with different forms of organization that others can adopt as the opportunities arise.

Training and Selection of Administrators and Teachers. With the increasing number of retirements of both school principals and teachers, school boards will have an opportunity to affect the cultures of their schools by selecting staff whose perspective and expertise will facilitate the development of schools that exert a strong "pull" on students. Too often, current appointment procedures result in the replacement of current staff with similar types of individuals because of "old boy" networks and the like. Adoption of less biased selection procedures, such as those advocated by Musella (1983), would assist in bringing about appropriate changes. Earlier sections concerned with school-level policies suggest the directions we believe these changes should take.

Principals are readily aware of the impact that selection of appropriate staff can have on a school. Selection of department heads from other schools is a common practice they use to bring about changes. Again, unbiased procedures combined with clear ideas about the direction of desired changes are critical if opportunities to replace staff are to be capitalized upon.

Support for Openness to Community. School boards have at their command the same variety of policy instruments that provinces have: regulation, funding, capacity building, and changing of institutional mandate. They can use several of these to encourage the degree of openness and responsiveness their schools show to their immediate communities. For example, principals' newsletters, observed in a number of schools, could be mandated in a school board, supported with funds from the board, and where necessary assistance could be provided in developing newsletter content and format. As well, by adopting open enrolment policies that allow parents to choose which school their children will attend, school boards can ensure that parents can "vote with their feet": choose one school rather than another. Combined with good information systems to ensure that principals and staff are aware of the decisions parents are making, it is possible to capitalize on environmental press as a stimulus for change; i.e., as a stimulus for openness and responsiveness.

Conversely, school boards can also ensure that board-wide regulations do not hamper the adaptation of schools. By way of example, limiting the selection of teachers to fill vacancies in a school to those displaced elsewhere removes from the principal one of the chief instruments for bringing about change. A policy that allows no school to offer a program not available in all schools has a similar deadening effect on the ability of schools to respond.

The thrust of current literature and policies suggests that holding schools responsible for their results while providing them with the freedom to respond is, in the long term, the most effective policy. Yet this approach can only be feasible if schools have the fiscal and human resources necessary to respond (Coopers & Lybrand, 1988).

Support for Orderly but not Over-Controlled School Environments. Widespread concern about discipline and order in schools is often reflected in public opinion surveys and in surveys of teachers (e.g., Montgomerie et al., 1988). Research on effective schools also documents the association of good order and good education. In this study, in contrast, the emphasis on order was inversely related to the measures of concern, dropout rate, attendance, suspensions, and the like. We came to the conclusion that an excessive concern about order, to the point at which *over*-controlled school environments had been created, was driving some students out of school by making it such an inhospitable place.

The key question, of course, is whether the extensive emphasis on order in the comprehensive and basic schools we visited was necessary because of valid, long-term concerns about the possibility of violence in the schools (see, for example, Webb-Proctor, 1988) or whether it was associated with a paternalistic attitude that saw obedience to authority as an important end in itself. Staff and administrators, in some cases, questioned whether or not the secure, dependent setting they had created helped their students to develop into mature, responsible individuals. Equally important, there is strong evidence that new management styles in the private sector are less dependent on a compliant labour force content with repetitive work, but need employees who can participate in a flexible mode of production in which they become, in part, responsible for solving problems that arise (Premier's Council, 1988; Naisbitt & Aburdne, 1985).

If schools are to lessen their emphasis on compliance, discipline, and order, while striving to create an orderly environment that reflects maturing attitudes and behaviours of students, they will need the strong support of school trustees. Such a move, we do not doubt, runs counter to public and often professional views of what is needed in schools. Old habits die hard. Teachers struggle daily with individual students who do their best to disturb the class. Students challenge the limits wherever they are set. Yet, if one result of the present system is the failure of students to develop, practice, and display self-discipline, are our schools achieving their highest objectives? The path we suggest is not easy, nor will it be achieved in one day or in one year; but with school boards supporting this endeavour, progress will be more likely.

Review of Codes of Conduct. Again, support of school boards is necessary if schools are to adapt their codes of conduct to rely more upon flexible, general codes aimed at developing personal responsibility among students. As well, school boards might well monitor and review different types of sanctions and their frequency of use to ensure that they support academic objectives and are meaningful sanctions to students.

Record Systems. As schools improve record-keeping systems that are used to monitor student attendance, they will need to draw upon board-wide technical expertise and, in all likelihood, financial resources. We would expect that board leadership would be necessary to standardize reporting procedures, such as the classification of types of absences, in order to ensure meaningful statistics are developed. Ideally, attendance systems can be linked to student personnel records so that data can be updated on a timely basis and analyses of various types can be carried out. For example, school boards could assess the impact of zoning changes on school attendance and retention, trace patterns of absenteeism back to neighbourhoods and feeder schools, and the like. In these ways, we might be able to better explain changes in these measures of school effectiveness and, therefore, address them with appropriate action.

Provincial Policies and Retention

The province of Ontario is already very active in implementing its program to bring about a reduction in school dropouts. It has adopted and is implementing policies in all four policy domains identified in the literature: mandates and regulations, capacity building, funding, and changes in institutional responsibility (the last referring to the full funding of Catholic high schools, which in the past have experienced lower dropout rates than public high schools). We focus on three specific areas which would involve the first and last of the policy options. The three areas discussed are data collection, data analysis, and the issue of streaming and the structure of the educational system. As a response to this last issue, we suggest additional changes in responsibility for secondary education by closer links and a sharing of responsibilities among secondary schools, community colleges, and universities.

Data Quality. Numerous studies have indicated that the lack of adequate data is the most frustrating problem in assessing the issue of school dropouts. We believe that Ontario has an acceptable system of collecting data on school retirements (to use the more general phrase) that can be refined to ensure more accurate and useful information. Currently, the September Report completed (or at least signed) by all school principals includes data on students who leave without completing a diploma, but ambiguities in the directions led to errors in at least five per cent of the submissions we reviewed. Better directions and better screening could lessen these problems. Ultimately, one could envision linked student record systems that facilitate both the collection of accurate data and the tracking of individual students; for the present, though, such integration is probably feasible only at a school board level. Nevertheless, assessing the experiments in this area under way in Manitoba and Quebec may be worthwhile.

Reporting of Data. At present, provincial statistics on school retention are regularly reported in *Education Statistics, Ontario*, an annual publication. In this publication, Table 2.10, "Progress of students, Grade 9 to first year postsecondary (including private)" and Table 2.02, "Retirements from secondary schools without diplomas or certificates", are key tables in this regard, but neither is ideal in the types of statistics it presents. It would seem possible, in both cases, to omit adult students from the statistics. The increasing numbers of adults returning to school, documented in Table 2.941, School re-entrants, would distort any time-series data for which they were not excluded. In 1985-86, there were 13,631 re-entrants 22 years of age and older, an increase from 7,628 in 1982 (*Educational Statistics, Ontario*, 1986).

It would seem, though, that much more could be done with these statistics at the school, board, and provincial levels. It may be worthwhile for the ministry to provide each school board with school retention trend data and dropout rates on a school-by-school basis. Province-wide trends, it should be noted, will be ambiguous for the next few years because extension of the Roman Catholic separate school system has resulted in the creation of a new base-line population. School-board and school-level reports would continue to be useful.

Streaming and the Structure of Education. The issue of streaming of courses and programs among and within schools needs to be considered from a societal and political context in order to be appreciated in full. Understanding these links and their history helps to develop an appreciation for the implications different approaches may have. Much of this debate may be more symbolic than real, but the symbols we are dealing with -- the place where you and I belong in our social system -- are among the most powerful in any community.

Radwanski (1987) recommends abandoning streaming and levels of programs, except for the least able. He mocks Ontario education for its various half-way reforms in the past. His is a classic "liberal" view that perceives a situation in which each person, competing with all others, fights for the top. This viewpoint contrasts with Ontario's classic "conservative" tradition of dividing its educational system in to separate, hierarchical levels that parallel the social roles of individuals. Underlying this latter practice is a corporate or holistic view of society not present in the classical liberal view. The "socialist" tradition of the nineteenth century, albeit for different ideological reasons, also accepts a corporate view of society, although it differs from the "conservative" view as to the hierarchical distribution of social, political and economic power among groups (Hartz, 1962; 1964; Horowitz, 1968; Lawton, 1979).

In recent decades the "conservative" viewpoint has been reflected in the Robarts Plan that separated high school students according to program (or branch) and length of study, the maintenance of two separate diplomas (Secondary School Graduation Diploma [SSGD] and Secondary School Honours Graduation Diploma [SSHGD]) even after introduction of the credit system, and, most recently, creation of the Ontario Academic Credits (OACs) as a separate class of courses to replace the SSHGD when a decision was taken to move to a single diploma (Ontario Secondary School Diploma [OSSD]). Though these changes suggest some movement in a "liberal" direction at the secondary level, no changes have been made at the postsecondary level where the streaming of students into terminal programs in Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) or to universities continues. This hierarchical structure of postsecondary education in Ontario parallels the systems generally found in Europe (Trow, 1988) and contrasts with open structures in many other provinces of Canada. In these, community colleges offer courses that may be transferred to universities for advanced standing; among the most open is the system in Quebec (OECD, 1976).

Recognizing that the current practice of streaming and allocation of institutional roles in Ontario are not working effectively, it does seem that movement toward a more competitive and less stratified educational system, secondary *and* postsecondary, is appropriate. While secondary teachers and adminstrators interviewed and surveyed were virtually united in their defense of some type of streaming, it was accepted that the market forces that had created a necessity of offering such courses as typing, drama, drafting, and business English at the advanced level made the system into a caricature of itself. As well, the *de facto* requirement that a student return after Grade 12 to finish OACs or the five English credits required for graduation means that some 18- and 19-year-old youth are spending a year to earn three or four credits. Although these students are doubtless valuable contributors to the social and extra-curricular lives of their schools and no doubt gain some benefit, we question the efficiency of the practice, the further delay it entails for youth entering the world of work after high school, and its effectiveness at preparing youth for postsecondary education.

It would seem, then, that one or more of the following steps would lead to the opening of the educational system to greater opportunities and competition: 1) provision and, possibly, the requirement of "open" level courses in subjects well suited for bringing all students together; this would included courses such as drama, typing, family studies, Canadian government, and the like. Open level courses would earn credits not designated as basic, general, or advanced; 2) provision of OACs or their equivalent at community colleges so that students with several credits left could finish their secondary diplomas in more adult-oriented institutions. As well, community college students who wish to consider university entrance would not have to return to high school to earn appropriate entry certification. It is worth noting, in this regard, that Ontario universities once offered a course of study paralleling Grade 13 (Fleming, 1971, p. 87); 3) allowing secondary students to register in community college and university courses that would earn credits that could be counted toward high school graduation and shorten programs in the colleges. Such advanced standing would be open to students who cannot find, within the high school offerings, courses at a suitable level of difficulty or technical sophistication themselves; and 4) provision of a full range of first-year university courses at community college in order to provide a "second chance" for students who did not earn sufficiently high marks to gain entry into Ontario's increasingly competitive university system.

A Final Comment

We believe the suggestions offered in this chapter have the potential for assisting schools, school boards, and the provincial government in responding the the problems associated with school retention. These suggestions address not just the issue of retaining students in school but also the provision of programs, services, and organizational structures that might enhance the experiences of most secondary school students.

Nevertheless, it seems important to acknowledge that our suggestions have, for the most part, taken for granted secondary schools as institutions with most of the same characteristics we have come to associate with them for the past century -- classroom instruction, a corps of teachers headed by principals and vice-principals, prescribed courses of study, an adolescent clientele, and the like. Equally fundamental, we have accepted, because the teachers and administrators who make the system work accept, a view of individual differences that gives meaning to terms such as "ability groups", "academic students", and "general-" and "basic-level students". As a result of these starting points, our suggestions represent adjustments in a widely shared perspective about the purposes and requirements of schooling.

Innovations we observed, including the integration of adults in secondary schools, the creation and operation of day care centres within schools, the extension of co-operative education from vocational schools to collegiate institutes, and the opening of marketing education "classrooms" in mall locations, challenge accepted views of secondary schools, of individual differences, and of traditional modes of instruction and evaluation. Implied is a perspective that suggests much less variability among the the potential contributions individuals can make if they are engaged in activities meaningful to them and supportive of their aspirations. These piecemeal changes in schools may evolve into a new form of education where the community, its institutions, and its members can serve as the schools, classrooms, and teachers. Emphasizing lifelong learning and pedagogical techniques such as mastery learning may well provide a rich and productive alternative for those who might otherwise end their educational careers too early -- too early for their personal benefit and too early for the society that needs the fullest development of the capabilities of all its members.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' COMMENTS ON TWO SECTIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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(10d) If you could change any one thing in your school to make it a more meaningful place for students at risk of leaving before graduation, what would it be? *(NOTE: Comments are grouped according to the themes developed in Chapter 4)*

Tracking and Sorting

-[Change] attitudes of staff, students and community toward general-level programs.
-Offer more general level-courses.
-Change stigma attached to basic and general programs.
-Eliminate teachers who do not provide full and interesting classes.
-Quality of education in the general-level class. Too often the wrong people teach these students.
-More interest and input from their parents from the beginning of primary school throughout high school.
-Generate more student motivation to do the best they can do.
-More meaningful curriculum.
-More follow-up with students and families.
-Improve the quality of the general-level programs.
-I would like to change parental attitude. Students cannot see the importance and relevance of education if this is not fostered in the home. Unfortunately, this school is in an area where parents will not participate or come out at all.
-Not to leave them feeling frustrated by the "go nowhere" philosophy so prevalent in a general-level course, which is academically geared to the underachiever. This does not give a student the drive or ambition to seek employment for the purpose of succeeding (personal success--not financial).
-Make all classes relevant to the needs of the students.
-Self-governing student body. More applied science and more equipment.
-The school is not the major factor. The parental attitude to education and the general happiness of the individual are the factors. Try correlating family problems and student achievement. It will cover 90 per cent of failures and dropouts easily. Why does no one recognize this? Many teachers do.

Negotiation

-Personalize, humanize. Get rid of the factory concept. Students do not produce. We shouldn't be marking products.
-Make it a community school.
-Have a staff which exemplifies teamwork and works with each other and the students to make school and learning a meaningful experience.
-Eliminate homework.
-Greater interaction of staff and students.
-More consistency re follow-through of disciplinary action -- students should feel there is little or no chance of their "getting away with" indiscretions -- action taken by the school should be swift and consistent with threats, not made unless they'll be followed up fairly but firmly.
-Include an "unstructured" type of elective credit: class members decide on topics, flexible. etc.
-More flexibility in ministry guidelines to allow changes according to the needs of the group being taught.

-More flexibility
-Enforce a code of discipline--including attendance, study habits--and develop life skills.
-I'd throw out about 1% of the student body. This 1% constantly interferes with the efficient running of a class. Other kids get frustrated because they can't learn.
-Make the lock-step routine more flexible.
-Smaller general classes to permit closer personal attention and encouragement. But not every potential dropout should be encouraged to remain in school.

Accreditation

-Reduce required credits to 27 for a diploma.
-Get rid of semestering.
-Eliminate semestering and increase the time that a teacher has to deal with individual student cases -- slow the pace and reduce the student-staff stress.
-Eliminate fast-tracking idea.
-Lower the number of compulsory courses.
-Eliminate the 5th English credit for general level.
-[Change] the preconceived ideas that only certain option selections will permit success in the future.
-More independent study.
-Give them many different methods of evaluation to get a good opportunity to pass.
-Standardized testing so that a student would feel that something worthwhile would be achieved by staying in school.

Staff Response

-I would change the categorizing of students and I would value mentorship between students and staff.
-Get rid of teachers who turn them off.
-Improve reward system so average kid gets more recognition.
-Discipline must be firm, fair and consistent by administration and teachers.
-Smaller class size and more individual attention.
-Make counselling mandatory before the decision is made.
-More peer counselling/coaching mentoring outside of classroom. Need to address teacher attitudes and approaches.
-Encouragement to discuss this with a counsellor early and repeatedly, not just once and [leave it until] the situation has worsened beyond recovery.
-Attitude of teachers to the students.
-Increase amount of personnel and time available for students.
-Firm guidelines on discipline so that removal from school is possible. This threat would ultimately best serve the interests of a student at risk.
-More personal contact between students and teachers outside of class.
-Re-structure school so that each teacher has the responsibility for monitoring the progress and welfare of a small group of students. Time in the day would be allotted for this. The teacher would monitor progress in all courses.
-More individual attention--working one on one.
-More guidance.
-Smaller classes/fewer classes for teachers to have more time with all students, especially those at risk.
-Make school more relaxed and friendly.
-I'd try to create a stronger sense of community that embraces and cares for all students; this would require a warmer friendlier environment.

-Provide a staff of people who truly care about kids and their problems.
-Put as much effort into guiding students who are not university-bound as the counsellors are at present putting into university-bound students.
-Staff attitudes. "Good" teachers given advanced courses. "Weak" teachers are given general and basic courses.
-Small classes.
-Teachers' attitudes toward and their treatment of students -- especially general-level students and minorities.
-Have a drop-in-centre where students under stress could get academic, educational, or personal help.
-Talk to their parents and fire some teachers who don't care.
-Reduce class size. It is difficult to reach out to such a student when he/she is one of 35.

Identity

-Improve their self-image.
-Increasing self-concept is of utmost importance. We do this! Any means of improving this is vital.
-Stress social skills.
-Put basic and special ed. students inside the school rather than in portables.
-Students find it difficult to continue under pressure of personal problems. If they can be convinced to believe in themselves, many will stay.
-The sense of being included by other students -- more acceptance of students with difficulties.
-More peer counselling.
-Stress citizenship.

Interests

-More life skill courses.
-More interdepartmental activities, perhaps course related.
-Provide more informal recreational space for positive non-instructional activities.
-Instill in them pride in the school and for what we do here. If they don't want to take advantage of what we offer they should not stay in the school system.
-Try to get students more involved in school activities. Things they want to do to make the school a better place to be.
-More club activities.
-Compulsory extra-curricular activities--must participate in at least two activities.
-A lot of sports, equipment and team uniforms.

Attendance

-Let them leave when they want but first assure them that they can come back whenever they want. There must be a complete open re-entry policy.
-We should clarify specific objectives and implement attendance and discipline policies stringently.
-Stricter attendance, late and skipping class procedures.
-Voluntary attendance after age 16. Students who miss too many classes and are warned, are dropped from course.

Labouring

-Encourage co-op courses.
-Gear programs to their interests and to their future requirements in the work place.
-More links with community, community speakers in school. Field trips to community businesses, higher profile for co-op learning.
-Updated equipment to prepare students for the world of work.
-More emphasis on practical, hands-on, meaningful learning.
-2 period, 2 credit shop courses in Grade 9 & 10 with co-op work as part of curriculum.
-Half-day learning, half-day work for pay.
-More co-op.
-More direct involvement with industrial type projects--industry to farm out work projects to tech students.
-Grant credits for jobs held outside the classroom.
-Increase student financial supports.
-Pay them to stay in school.
-Integrate school with co-op.
-More vocational courses for students in general.
-Have a student-run business in the school.
-More meaningful material for students who will soon enter work force.
-Bring the real world into the classroom.
-The work world teaches many lessons better than we do.
-Make co-op, independent learning, work experience etc. more flexible at any time during the semester.
-Closer co-ordination between curriculum design and job opportunities to give general-level students the assurance they are in school for a purpose. At present, success in general-level does not mean employability.

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(Back Page) Have you any additional information you wish to provide, or comments you wish to make about the completion of this questionnaire?

1. It is essential that the parents and students be told the truth in everyday English, the progress being made in school from Kindergarten through to OAC. It is too late to find out that Gino cannot read in Grade 6 or Jean does not know the basics in mathematics. Cold hard facts go a long way in encouraging both parents, child and school to work harder toward a successful goal.

2. Your study is very critical at this point in education. It is time to focus the ideals of education back to our kids. We (teachers, administrators, senior board officials, parents and business) need to assist ALL students to reach potential in school therefore we as a system must react in providing programs to specifically retain students. (Amen) P.S. Attendance is an issue that I constantly address. "If you're not in class I miss you," is my plea to kids.

3. I have seldom met a teacher who did not consider his subject matter really "great stuff" to learn and know (myself included.) Is it not possible that the students who comprise the lower half of the bell curve just don't "dig" it the way we do ... and perhaps never will. Schools may just be for scholars. A really new concept is needed.

4. A General Comment on Educational Philosophy: We are not being fair to our young people by continuing to spread propaganda that everyone should strive to be a chief. Those that can never make it become very disappointed Indians -- bitter and poorly trained Indians. Society needs more qualified Indians with a sense of self-respect about what they do in life, and parents should accept this reality for their children. We have a terrible shortage of "good Indians." They should be admired by society, not downgraded by the academic fraternity who were able to be recognized for their accomplishments.

5. Maybe leaving school to become a useful member of society is not so bad. The "dead beats" stay in school where it's warm and their friends are. Streaming is not the problem. Too many choices and no direction from school or home leads to a floundering and a "hit and miss" attitude. You're barking up the wrong tree with junk like this, again, as usual.

6. Students who leave school early generally have low self-esteem developed at an early age in the home -- are very susceptible to peer pressure. They do not have the coping skills necessary in dealing with frustrations of failure and would rather quit than try and fail -- cannot complete a task of just sitting still for 10 minutes in class. Failure is a negative word and we as teachers are not helping students in using their failures as a learning tool necessary for success.

7.I feel that we spend too much of our time formulating policies for the level 5 students and not enough time on students that will be leaving school after Grade 12. More emphasis should be placed on a more rounded education, rather than a more specialized education.

8. It's about time somebody better defined the term "dropout rate." There is no shame attached -- or there shouldn't be --to ending one's formal education at age 16 and going off to be a hairdresser or a brick layer's helper. If social inequity is indeed a factor in the "streaming" of students, then it behooves the government to correct social injustice. In the schools, we do our best with what we're given.

9. The Ministry of Education and provincial government keep promoting programs, policies, guidelines which schools and boards must implement. All of this requires money and materials. When things don't work it's the fault of teachers, schools and school boards. Let's start getting real grass-roots input instead of: a) dealing with people who have been out of the classroom, b) getting advice from people who are part of the "system" at the ministry level. P.S. Educate the Minister. We are getting tired of always being blamed for the ills of education when in fact we only "do as we're told!"

10.With regard to general students, all curriculum and decisions are slanted to the 6% of the population who graduate from university. Note -- all technical programs are being eliminated. Credit requirements make sure of this. Where does this leave the general student? On the streets.

11.The board has an extremely poor attitude towards tech. The budgets for tech departments are one indication, maintenance and updating of classrooms and equipment is another. The tone of the school is set by the principal, the tone of the department by the department head. That filters down to the teachers and students -- in this school, who cares!

12. Part-time work and "I got to have it now" society are causing early dropouts, fast tracking and a general lack of fun in growing up and going to school. Educators must show students that the time spent in secondary schools is short (five years) in relation to a lifetime and the more students put into it, the more they will get out. Finally, we pay too much attention to business. The same people who constantly tell us that our students are not capable of reading and writing, lure students to $4 per hour jobs and trap them into believing working comes first, even before school and

family. Semestering dictates a student do homework every night but how, when he or she is working during the week?

13. Your question fits within the framework of education as it currently exists. It does not call into question or provide a chance for responses that are pro education but anti school. One suspects the objective is further fine tuning of the current system of social control.

14. Over 90% of the kids I teach go to postsecondary institutions. In 20 years of teaching, none of my students has had any type of department exam so that I can compare my evaluation with that of the other schools. Some type of standard exam for all is a must on a regular basis. This would be a benefit to all (i.e., teachers, kids, ...) It does not have to count for a great deal of the student's June mark but it would help improve the system in the long run.

15. A large number of students are being short-changed by our system. While students are selecting advanced programs in larger numbers, many will not go to university and will go to community college and displace many general students who are then turned away. Meanwhile technical facilities are vacant in high schools (because of OSIS and a mandarin mentality) and teachers of technological subjects are teaching in academic or non-credit areas. This will also result in problems for our industrial base and our economic future as our economic welfare hinges largely upon industry.

16. Politicians have done more harm than good to the process of education in this province. Mr. Radwanski is on the wrong track. The "dropout rate" (an insulting term that should be replaced by "realization that this school has nothing to offer me") is not high enough. Streaming is essential but should be based on willingness to accept and participate in the goals of the program -- not on academic level. Students who realize it is best for them to "drop out" must have an apprentice program to go into that will teach them the skills they need to survive in the working world. The primary reason for the lack of success of present day schools is that teachers are given a work load that is impossible to carry and achieve excellence. They find that they must over organize and institutionalize their classrooms in order to survive. Increasing the number of teachers and providing more money for books/supplies/resources would solve the problem but society may not be able to afford the increased cost -- so -- we will continue to short-change the slow, the stupid and the disadvantaged -- why should we be any different?

17. Students who leave early are more interested in earning money, buying a car, and partying. They know schooling will help but it is not worth the effort for them when they can get out and earn money now. We live in an instant society whereas education is a long term process demanding discipline and hard work.

18. I feel that poor family support is the biggest contributor to many students dropping out.

19. Many of my students work part time (often until the early hours of the morning) and this interferes with their studies.

20. Everyone seems to see the need for hands-on knowledge to meet the demands of our rapidly changing technology, yet no effort is being made to provide this training (hands-on) to work in parallel with the glorified academic (purely) training. High schools do have the basic training equipment, and at present, the teachers do provide this form of educational program. Perhaps your survey should have included the question --- Do you see a need for technical facilities in the high school?

21. I think that the educational system is not preparing general-level students to find a place in the world of work. Anything that can be done in providing "paying" apprenticeship programs for young people age 16 and over would be a step in the right direction.

22. The administration here tries to provide an environment which helps risk students help themselves, but they are frustated often by unco-operative teachers. So often students can be "touched" by a teacher who may influence them to stay in school. The more teachers we have that truly love kids, the better chance we'll have of reaching individuals who have problems with the system.

23. The technical education in Canada is low compared to some European countries. The apprenticeship program must be improved. Some students need this at a much earlier age. There must be more ways of moving from technical stream to university (engineering, etc.). The German system is an excellent model where the majority of students entering university come from the technical side. Ontario must stay ahead in technical expertise. We cannot mine or cut lumber forever.

24. When students are streamed by interest (i.e business, academic, technical) retention might be improved. This streaming could occur at end of Grade 10(?) ... OSIS forgot about general-level students!

25. The recent statements made by the government regarding education never cease to amaze me. How can we keep general-level students in school by standardizing exams, increasing course content, increasing required subjects, and generally making their life more difficult? The reality is that many of these students lack life skills and have poor self-worth. They are bright and intelligent. The sytem just doesn't meet their needs. 35 general students in a class is too many.

26. At this school, parents place students in the advanced program even if they should be in basic. It is considered better for a student to fail advanced twice, then pass with a 50%, than to do well in general level.